

High Representative announces satisfactory implementation of his Decision on Zepce

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, in the presence of the Governor of Zenica-Doboj Canton, Mr Herceg Mugdim, the Chair of the Zepce Interim Board, Mr Nedžad Hodžić, and Vice-Chair, Mr Ivica Ramljak, today announced the satisfactory implementation of his Decision on Zepce. The process of integrating the Zepce municipality into the political and administrative structures of Zenica-Doboj Canton is largely completed. After years of uncertainty about the legal status of the municipality and of the existence of illegal parallel structures, one of the legacies of the war has been overcome and a consensus has been achieved that is in the interest of all the citizens of Zepce and the surrounding municipalities.

The High Representative announced that necessary conditions to overcome the deadlock in the area, laid down in his Decision of 6 October 2000, have been met. These comprise:

1. the integration of the two parallel administrations in Zepce Municipality;
2. the dismantling of municipal institutions of the illegal "Herceg-Bosna" structures and their integration into the legal system of Zenica-Doboj Canton; and
3. the realignment of borders in order to meet the concerns of Croats living in areas bordering Zepce Municipality.

The High Representative is fully aware of the fact that several villages along the Zepce municipal borders have asked for further boundary adjustments, but he has made clear that this needs full consensus and local support. No such consensual proposal has been received yet. However, the High Representative notes that the authorities of Zenica-Doboj Canton and its Governor, Mr Mugdim, have given assurances that the concrete concerns of citizens with regard to health, education and security will be addressed. The High Representative will closely monitor all further developments in the Zepce region.

The High Representative thanked the Governor of Zenica-Doboj Canton, the Members of the Interim Board, Supervisor Richard Williams, and the members of the International Review Panel for their successful efforts to implement his Decision. He welcomed the excellent way in which the process has been conducted, beyond the original requirements of his Decision. The return rate in the Zepce municipality is the highest in the Federation and the returns process has largely been completed in the town itself. Extensive aid has supported the return process and also encouraged a considerable expansion of construction projects and the creation of a large number of medium and small businesses in the area.

The High Representative expressed his support for early elections in Zepce municipality. As the framework for these elections is now in place. Now that the BiH Election Law has been passed, it is up to the Election Commission to decide, together with the Zepce Municipal Election Commission, when and how to hold elections.

The High Representative appointed Alexander Rothert from Germany, who has extensive experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to replace Richard Williams as Supervisor for Zepce. The Supervisor will oversee the task of bringing

together the community of Zepce and safeguarding the rights of all its citizens.