

OHR and Council of Europe host Human Rights Forum

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Matthias Sonn, the BiH Minister of Civil Affairs and Communications, Svetozar Mihajlovic, Mr Hugh Chetwynd of the Council of Europe's Human Rights Directorate General, and Judge Peer Lorenzen of the European Court of Human Rights opened a one-day forum on Wednesday designed to highlight the role of the Government Agents. These agents represent the Entity and BiH State authorities before the Human Rights Chamber. When BiH, as is widely hoped, accedes to the Council of Europe, the agents will represent BiH before the European Court of Human Rights, defending cases and enforcing Court judgments.

The work of the agents may have a huge impact on the lives of BiH citizens. Cases brought before the European Court routinely affect domestic legislation. In addition, the Court will be, following accession, the ultimate recourse for BiH citizens who believe their human rights have been infringed.

The forum examined ways in which government institutions and the judiciary at State and Entity level can facilitate the work of the Government Agents and thus improve the human-rights situation in BiH.

Minister Mihajlovic and the SDHR expressed their full support for the present work of the agents and for what will be a significantly expanded range of activities following BiH's eventual accession to the CoE. They called on all government

departments and the judiciary, at all levels, to work with the agents so as to ensure that the rights of the respective governments and of all BiH citizens are fully protected.