

Statement by the Senior Deputy High Representative on Customs Tariff Schedule

Senior Deputy High Representative, Dr. Hanns Heinrich Schumacher, attended a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 23 December during which the Council was called upon to adopt an interim Customs Tariff Schedule in line with the 20 December deadline set forth in the Bonn Document.

Seeing as the Council of Ministers has failed to make this move, Dr. Schumacher issues the following statement:

"The State Parliament adopted on 20 June the interim State Customs Tariff Policy Law, which incorporates, in its Annex 1, a Customs Tariff Schedule specifying the rates of import duties for some 8.500 categories of goods. The Parliament also adopted a resolution demanding the appointment of a Tariff Commission charged with modifying the rates of import for a certain amount of goods.

The Tariff Commission was established in September with the participation of State and Entity experts. The Commission reached a unanimous agreement on a modified Customs Tariff Schedule and has reported this to the Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations. The Council of Ministers, however, did not meet in time to adopt the Customs Tariff Schedule and has failed to come to an agreement during its 23 December session.

Since the application of a common customs tariff schedule is an essential part of the normalisation and the integration of the economy, the High Representative has decided to enact this Customs Tariff Schedule, Annex 1 of the interim State Customs Tariff Policy Law, with effect 10 January 1998. The final Customs Tariff Policy law still remains to be adopted".

In addition, upon request of the Office of the High Representative, the Council of Ministers was to reach two decisions establishing the Bosnia and Herzegovina Commission for Demining in order to render the Demining infrastructure operational. The London Conference already required that the UN Mine Action Center should be handed over to the institutions of BiH by 31 December 1997. The Bonn Conclusions re-emphasised this deadline.

A Commission established by the Council of Ministers itself and assisted by the donors under OHR and UN chairmanship had worked hard to formulate the necessary documents for simple approval by the Council of Ministers. Although Co-Chair Dr. Haris Silajdzic and Vice Chair Neven Tomic signed the documents, Co-Chair Boro Busic, at the instigation of the Minister for Civil Affairs Spasoje Albijanic, refused to do so, failing to provide any reasonable argument for his action.

This lax and indifferent attitude towards one of the country's greatest problems is unacceptable, if not downright outrageous.

The High Representative hereby rules that both the Decision on the Establishment of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Commission for Demining and the Decision on the Establishment of the BiH Mine Action Center (BHMACE), have been adopted.

The High Representative urgently calls upon the CoM to establish the Commission for it to be in place in January by appointing, without any further delay, the members of the Commission and taking a decision on its budget, as suggested by the OHR already in October.

The lives of people endangered by existing mine fields must not be an issue of party politics.

Press Statement, 24 December 1997