High Representative Meets Izetbegovic

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, today met Member of Presidency Alija Izetbegovic to discuss property law implementation. After the meeting, he stated the following:

“I told Mr Izetbegovic about the need for unconditional support for the implementation of the amended housing and property laws. I will regard respect for citizens’ rights as a measure of progress in the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, and of the level of maturity of governance.

“I emphasized that the housing and property laws are now harmonized. As a result, all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina enjoy the same rights and the same protection under the law. As I said before, I expect every single housing official in Bosnia and Herzegovina, every responsible minister, every mayor, prime minister and governor, and every government to implement the laws.

“I asked Mr Izetbegovic to use his influence to ensure that the authorities take responsibility for the administrative task that lies ahead of them – the processing and solving of tens of thousands of citizens’ claims for repossession of occupancy rights and property. This also means that next year’s local budgets must include adequate funding to increase the administrative capacity of the responsible bodies, and that there must be sufficient funds for minor housing repairs and infrastructural connections.

“Mr Izetbegovic and I discussed the meaning of the constitutionally granted citizen’s right to his home. I explained that this is the right to the individual’s original home. Though there is a need to use the available housing space rationally, that cannot be done at the expense of

citizens' rights. This would be anathema to the Dayton Agreement and the present laws.

"We also talked about evictions of displaced people and refugees who cannot yet return to their own homes. I have absolute understanding for the difficulty that this poses. But nobody can remain in another person's home – this would be theft. And the denial of one person's right to return does not justify the denial of another person's right to return. If the responsible authorities apply the property laws as well as laws applicable to refugees, displaced people and social cases, everybody in need of housing, including all displaced people and refugees, will be offered temporary accommodation.

"I was very happy about Mr Izetbegovic's recent remark that senior officials should serve as an example and move out of claimed apartments. I also asked him to use his influence to put an end to the widespread misuse of housing space, in particular in the centers of cities and towns. It is not the displaced people and refugees who occupy these apartments, but officials, state employees, professors, policemen, etc. I know that apartments used to be one of the perks employees received in the Communist system. But one cannot hand out apartments that belong to somebody else – somebody who cannot return for this reason. Many of the current beneficiaries have other accommodation available, and that must be thoroughly examined.

"Lastly, I asked for Mr Izetbegovic's support for the establishment of an independent judiciary and for the continuing fight against corruption. In Tuzla Canton, public officials have been charged with the abuse of public office involving millions of KM of Cantonal funds. The trials are starting now. I consider it of utmost importance that they be free, fair and expeditious.

"We had a good meeting. Mr Izetbegovic promised to do his best to ensure the implementation of the housing and property laws. They are about fundamental individual rights to return, to

one’s home and one’s property, they are about the Rule of Law, about respect for citizens, and in a way, they are the essence of the Dayton Peace Agreement.”