

Zepce

The Office of the High Representative notes with regret the withdrawal of the SDA delegation from the ongoing negotiations over Zepce. The failure by the SDA to participate in the preparatory meetings, as agreed by all participants, including the SDA delegation, on 8 January, leaves OHR no choice but to cancel the meeting scheduled for 16 January in Rajlovac.

The OHR remains convinced that seeking a solution acceptable to all sides in the north of Canton 4 is the only way forward. The framework of such a solution, which involves compromise by all sides, is much clearer following the intensive negotiations of the last weeks. The OHR was encouraged by the readiness for serious negotiations demonstrated by all parties in the preparatory meetings. The OHR is also encouraged by many signs on the ground suggesting that the population is willing to find a way out of the deadlock.

Most politicians in Zepce, Maglaj and Zavidovici realize that the preservation of the status quo hurts the population and the business communities of all ethnic groups, and may lead donors to turn their back on the north of Canton 4. However, some politicians seem to believe that boycotting negotiations and making maximalist, non-compromising demands, will help them achieve a better outcome. This is a mistake: it should be left to the people of Zepce to decide on their future.

Next week the OHR will present a detailed position paper outlining to the people of Zepce as well as to leading politicians in Sarajevo, what a compromise could look like. The OHR will also present strong economic arguments in favor of such a solution. A compromise must also contain guarantees to all sides that what is agreed will be implemented.

The objective of OHR, accepted in previous meetings by all sides, has not changed: to achieve, in a manner conducive to

lasting stability,

- the establishment of a functioning municipal government and administration;
- the integration of Zepce municipality in Cantonal structures;
- alterations to municipal boundaries while preserving the territorial integrity of Zepce municipality.