

## **Steering Board Meeting in Sarajevo**

Today, the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council met in Sarajevo at the level of political directors to review the latest developments in the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

In spite of the present focus on election campaigns, Steering Board members noted that some progress has been achieved since their last meeting in July. For example, several laws have been passed such as the Law on Customs, the Konvertibilna Marka is now accepted throughout the country, passports are being issued both in the Federation and the RS, the restructuring of the media is making progress, and there have been some minority returns — limited in numbers, but significant in their meaning.

With regard to the elections, the Steering Board expressed its full support of the OSCE for its excellent job in organizing and supervising the elections as well as the pre-election campaign. The Steering Board members expect the polls to be conducted in a free and fair manner, to take place without any incidents and to produce an outcome that will strengthen democracy in this country.

The Steering Board calls on all citizens to avail of the opportunity to cast their votes and reminds them that the elections provide a unique opportunity to elect leaders who will work in their interest and lead the country in a responsible way. The Steering Board also expressed the view that intimidation of voters or threats of any kind — against individuals or threats to boycott the elections — were a violation of democratic principles. The use of such means is not a stable foundation for democracy.

The Steering Board members reiterated their commitment to the return of all refugees and displaced persons to their homes, and call on the authorities to put more efforts into achieving this objective. The international community has always worked towards this goal and will push especially hard to ensure that the newly-elected leaders fulfill their commitments..

Steering Board members stressed the importance of minority returns to the major cities of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a means of encouraging minority returns to the rest of the country. In that context, Sarajevo has a special obligation due to its status as the capital city and because of its noted previous multi-ethnic character. This obligation is clearly defined in the Sarajevo Declaration. High Representative Carlos Westendorp informed the Steering Board that there has been some progress in creating the right conditions for the return of minorities to Sarajevo, and conveyed the wish of the authorities that all donors resume provision of aid to the city. The Steering Board indicated that even more needs to be done to achieve the targets of the Sarajevo Declaration, but that the efforts of the authorities are encouraging. If they continue, the members did not exclude the possibility of calling on all donors to resume providing aid to the city.

The Steering Board also discussed the deadline set in the Federation property and housing laws, under which the occupancy right to socially-owned flats can be reclaimed only until October 4th. The Steering Board noted with concern continuing problems with the submission of such claims and discussed the need for an extension of the application deadline.

The Steering Board noted the substantial progress that has been made with media restructuring and, in particular, the work that has been done to remove political control and influence from public broadcasting. The Steering Board endorsed the High Representative's approach to the HRT question and the necessity to clarify the legal status of Erotel and the transmitters in Western Herzegovina. They noted with satisfaction the establishment of the Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the contributions that it has already made in finding a solution to the HRT question and to regulating the work of electronic media.

The Steering Board members also discussed several other issues, including the reform of the judicial system, the Ploce negotiations and succession matters. They decided to convene again on October 6.