

High Representative Annuls Bicakcic's Car Import Decision

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, yesterday issued a Decision annulling the Federation Prime Minister's decision to allow the import of 900 private vehicles that had entered Bosnia and Herzegovina based on fraudulent papers, which excluded them from customs duties.

Mr Bicakcic's decision was illegal and would have robbed the citizens of the Federation of much needed funds. The High Representative, when issuing the annulment Decision, commented that with this kind of behaviour "people such as Bicakcic demonstrate how unfit they are for positions of public trust".

The vehicles in question had been cleared by customs on the basis of documents bearing false customs stamps. Since the Federation Customs Administration identified the first such cases in January this year, a total of 900 cases of illegally imported cars have come to light. In each case, the importer was attempting to defraud the budget of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina of urgently needed revenues. In the course of the investigation of the Customs Administration termed "Vehicle", some 150 cars were seized and customs violation proceedings were initiated against the owners.

When, on October 10 of this year, the Federation Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Dragan Covic, proposed that the seized cars should be returned to the owners and proceedings against them dropped if they paid the customs duties, the Federation Customs Administration advised that the proposed course of action was illegal under Article 16 of the Federation's own Law on Customs Duties. Mr Covic subsequently refrained from legalising the import of the cars.

However, Mr Bicakcic, flaunting the Federation Law and turning a blind eye to attempts to rob the citizens of the Federation – the very people whose interests he should be serving – used his powers as Prime Minister to issue a decision, published in the Federation Official Gazette on October 19th, identical to Mr Covic's proposal. Mr Bicakcic's decision was illegal and represented an attempt to interfere with the efforts of the Ministry of Finance and its Customs Administration to combat fraud and tax evasion.

The High Representative's Decision shall be published without delay in the Official Gazette of the Federation and will come into effect on that date.