

The High Representative and the BiH Presidency Discuss the Development of the Public Broadcasting Service

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, today discussed the development of the Public Broadcasting Service of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the members of the BiH Presidency.

The High Representative told the Presidency that he views the PBS of BiH as crucial to the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. He emphasised the importance of replacing the legacy of "state" broadcasting with genuine public broadcasting that informs citizens and is free from political interference or ethnic prejudice. Old structures left over from the war and from the former Yugoslavia must be replaced with efficient organisations that are editorially independent and financially transparent. Quality public broadcasting should reflect also the diverse cultural identities of Bosnia-Herzegovina

The High Representative said that Entity broadcasters would continue to play an important role in serving their audiences. He said he expected the PBS to produce an evening news programme that would be broadcast at the same time in both Entities.

The High Representative informed the Presidency that the PBS of BiH has been accepted as a member of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). This is an extremely encouraging step that will bring sports and other attractive programming to all the citizens of BiH, including the Olympic games in Sydney. The EBU's decision marks the beginning of a new era for broadcasting in this country.

Describing the work of the Transfer Agent, the High Representative said the scale of the problems inherited from the former broadcasting system should not be underestimated. A comprehensive financial and technical review has revealed that sweeping changes are necessary to bring public broadcasting in line with current European standards and practice.

The Transfer Agent explained to the Presidency that he is preparing his decision on the division of broadcasting resources as required by the July 1999 Decision which established the PBS. He said that he favoured a new structure that would allow the Entity broadcasters and PBS to concentrate on their primary task – creating programmes. Property and technical resources would be managed in separate organisations, reflecting current trends among European broadcasters.

The High Representative dismissed recent press reports that alleged that the Founding Board of PBS had been dissolved. Quite the contrary, the High Representative stressed the importance of the Founding Board's work and that its decisions be taken free from political interference.

The High Representative and members of the Presidency agreed that a professional and independent public broadcasting sector is pivotal for the development of democracy and pluralism in BiH.