

Elections Are the Indispensable Mechanism of a Functioning Democracy

The High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, today welcomed the BiH House of Peoples' decision to amend the BiH Election Law, allowing voters to be registered automatically. The system, known as "Passive Voter Registration" should simplify the voting process, and encourage voters to the polls.

Election turnout has dropped off – from a high of 80% in 1996 to 46% in 2004. In part this is because at every election voters need to check if they are accurately registered. "Elections are the indispensable mechanism of a functioning democracy. Nothing is more important than citizens being able to exercise their right to vote, and to participate in elections," said the High Representative today.

The road to Europe requires BiH to be a fully sovereign democracy, without the interventionist powers of the High Representative. This transition is being planned for the first or second quarter of 2007. "That makes the October election crucial, as the BiH electorate will be choosing who will really run this country," the High Representative said. "This country is not going to acquire the attributes of a prosperous democracy – accountable politicians, an efficient administration and a healthy economy – through the generosity of the International Community. It is going to acquire those attributes when the people of BiH demand them at the ballot box."

"We must make sure that this year's election campaign is about concrete issues, and it is up to the stakeholders of this country: individual citizens, civil society groups, and trades

union, for example – to make the political parties focus on concrete issues. The Parties will not be accountable unless the electorate makes them accountable,” he said.

The time needed to introduce the Passive Voter Registration System is now of crucial importance. A number of technical requirements, including finding the required funding, purchasing and installing equipment, hiring and training personnel and ensuring that accurate voter information is collected, must be completed if the Passive Voter Registration System is to be introduced for the General Elections this October. This will require cooperation from all levels of Government in BiH. Implementation of the Passive Voter Registration system is crucial in the next period, as there is no alternative system available for registering voters if the Passive Voter Registration is not implemented in time.

On 2 February this year the BiH Council of Ministers endorsed the proposal to introduce Passive Voter Registration for the 2006 elections. The Council of Ministers has tasked the BiH EC, the MoFT, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees to co-ordinate, monitor and manage the new system.