

High Representative welcomes Progress in the Establishment of a Professional and Apolitical Civil Service in BiH

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, is pleased that the process of providing Bosnia and Herzegovina with a professional, apolitical civil service has entered its final phase, and urges all concerned to pass the drafted legislation as soon as possible. He welcomes the constructive attitude that Bozidar Matic, the Chair of the Council of Ministers, and his ministers have shown throughout the recent drafting process. The High Representative is particularly satisfied that Mr Matic two days ago accepted the High Representative's suggestion that the future Agency for Civil Service be headed by a foreign expert for an initial period.

The reform of the State-level public administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which employs several hundred staff, is a key element on the road towards the integration of this country into the European Union. At its meetings in Madrid in December 1998 and in Brussels last year, the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) requested that the State-level public administration be professionalised and made apolitical. It stated that party affiliation and nepotism should no longer be a basis for a job within the public administration in order to enable the citizens of this country to receive the services they deserve from their administration. A professional, independent civil service is also a requirement under the "EU Road Map," which is the next step BiH has to take on its way towards Europe.

The draft civil service law drafted by a working group comprising representatives from the State-level ministries, other State institutions and the Office of the High Representative envisages the creation of an Agency for Civil Service, which will be responsible for the selection, appointment and dismissal of the staff of the State ministries. A merit-based recruitment and promotion within the public administration, through this Agency, is essential to the establishment of a professional administration. Such an agency is a standard procedure in many democratic countries and particularly needed in BiH, which still battles the Communist heritage of nepotism and political dominance of all spheres of life.

Due to the political pressures that the head of the Agency is likely to be exposed to, the High Representative recently suggested that it be initially headed by a foreign expert, who will lead the reform effort through the implementation of the draft Civil Service Law. He is pleased that Bozidar Matic, Chair of the Council of Ministers, accepted this suggestion last Wednesday, when the Council of Ministers met with the political directors of the Steering Board in Sarajevo.

Professionalism and impartiality within the State-level public administration are long overdue. The High Representative is hopeful that the final touches will be put on the law in the next few days, so that the Council of Ministers can consider it at one of its next sessions and subsequently pass it on to the BiH Parliament for approval.