

International Principals advise against Halilovic's re-assuming ministerial post

At their regular weekly meeting, which took place yesterday, the Principals of the five main international organisations operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative, General John Sylvester, the SFOR Commander, Jacques Paul Klein, the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General and Co-ordinator of U.N. Operations in BiH, Robert Beecroft, Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Werner Blatter, Chief of the UNHCR Mission to BiH – agreed that it would be advisable for Sefer Halilovic not to re-assume his former position as Minister for Social Affairs, Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Federation Government, before his trial in the Hague takes place and his role in the 1992-1995 war in BiH is clarified.

While there are no legal obstacles to such a move and Mr Halilovic, by all accounts, carried out his tasks as minister to everybody's satisfaction, it would not be in accordance with European standards if a person indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague held a ministerial position. This might decrease the respect that the Federation Government enjoys and put in question the attempts to exclude indicted war criminals from public life.

The Federation Government, when deciding on this matter, should also bear in mind that Mr Halilovic's reinstatement might be perceived negatively by those who suffered from the war crimes of which Mr Halilovic is accused and who are citizens of the Federation.

The position of a minister for refugees and social affairs requires that the people for whom the minister is responsible have confidence in him, and an indicted war criminal might not elicit such confidence, notwithstanding the fact that he is presumed innocent until proven guilty.