

Judicial Salaries should not Jeopardise Functioning of the Courts

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown participated today at the Conference on Judicial Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Current Status and Future Challenges, organised by High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of BiH (HJPC).

At the Conference, he outlined a number of the achievements of the OHR in the area of judicial reform, such as, the establishment of the State Court and its special panel for Organised Crime and Corruption, the upcoming establishment of the War Crimes Chamber in the State Court and the restructuring of the prosecutors' offices.

He also outlined the challenges for the future in the area of judicial reform, drawing attention to the issue of financing the judiciary and judicial salaries. He pointed out that while his predecessor increased salaries for judges and prosecutors in order to shield them from possible bribery, these increases have since continued at an unaffordable rate. "Salaries for judges and prosecutors have continued to increase by 10% a year – a total of 40% in four years! This at a time when there is a lack of adequate funding available for courts and prosecutors' offices," said the High Representative.

He pointed out that 84% of total budget now represents personal costs – salaries and benefits. Only 16% of the budget is left for other running expenses – such as electricity, heating, telephones. "Many courts in both entities cannot proceed with trials because the required experts cannot be paid due to a lack of adequate funding. More

than 70 % of the courts in the RS are faced with disconnection of phone or mail services.," said the High Representative. "This continuous growth of salaries is clearly not sustainable and must be stopped immediately".

In order to create a healthy budgetary situation in the judiciary, the High Representative said that salaries must be reduced at certain court levels by up to 16% in the Federation, and up to 4 % in the RS. Such a measure would reduce the personnel costs to around 70% , in line with European standards, said the High Representative. "This will enable the judiciary to operate more effectively and concentrate on dispensing justice," he noted.