

# **OHR and OSCE Call for Urgent Adoption of Election Law**

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, and the Head of the OSCE Mission to BiH, Robert M. Beecroft, deplore the most recent failure of the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly to adopt the Election Law, despite the repeated calls to do so by the Peace Implementation Council. The High Representative and OSCE Head of Mission held their first official meeting since Robert Beecroft's appointment as head of the OSCE Mission in BiH, following the High Representatives return from the Council of Europe meeting in Strasbourg. Both agreed that BiH can not wait until September to pass an election law, which is required now, in a matter of days rather than weeks.

If presidential elections are to happen in October 2002, the machinery of the electoral system must be put in place without further delay. Considerable time will be needed to draft the necessary regulations, pass entity election laws, and accomplish other vital tasks. Whilst it is true that the High Representative urged extension of the Council of Europe's deadline in Strasbourg, BiH can not wait this long. The issues at stake will be the same in September as they are now – there is no excuse for delay.

Continued failure to adopt the election law will have long-term consequences. The road to Europe will remain blocked. Moreover, the election law remains a precondition for BiH entry into the Council of Europe and for completion of the European Communities "Road Map". Most importantly, the economic and political credibility of Bosnia and Herzegovina will be seriously damaged. Foreign investors will shun a country that lacks such a basic element of statehood as an election law.

The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina mandates the holding of presidential elections in October 2002. The OSCE Permanent Council has made clear that the OSCE will not organize or administer further elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is no alternative to holding these elections under an Election Law passed by domestic authorities. The High Representative and the OSCE Head of Mission expect the authorities to take ownership of the process and provide their citizens with the ability to exercise their most basic democratic right. The Election Law must therefore be passed as soon as possible, and well in advance of September. The political representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina need to act quickly and decisively in order to make their country a full member of the family of democratic states.

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