OHR and OSCE formally present Election Law to BiH Parliament

Ambassador Robert Barry, Head of the OSCE Mission to BiH and Mr Francois Froment-Meurice, the Chairman of the Election Law Commission, formally presented the draft Election Law to BiH Parliamentary Assembly officials today in Sarajevo, following the Peace Implementation Council's Steering Board approval of the draft in Sarajevo yesterday.

Earlier the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, Ambassador Barry and Mr Froment-Meurice provided a courtesy copy to the members of the BiH Presidency. Ambassador Barry and Mr Froment-Meurice also provided a copy to the Co-Chairs and Vice-Chair of the BiH Council of Ministers. The BiH Parliamentary Assembly is expected to take up the Election law in the next several weeks.

Messrs Barry and Froment-Meurice called on the BiH Parliamentary Assembly to take up the parliamentary process of the law immediately – calling the law one of the most critical steps forward in the democratization process for BiH.

The High Representative and Ambassador Barry congratulate Mr Froment-Meurice and the members of the Working Group for their dedication to the difficult task of preparing the draft Election Law during the past year.

The draft was prepared by Bosnian and international experts from Europe and the United States in a joint effort by the Office of the High Representative and the OSCE Mission to BiH. Both OHR and OSCE note the importance of the passage of this Law through the BiH Parliament for BiH becoming a member of the Council of Europe.

The new draft law incorporates an Open List Proportional Representation System for all levels of elections; the Preferential Vote System for the Presidency and cross-entity support for the BiH Presidency; multi-member constituencies; a requirement that at least one-third of the candidates' list is of a second gender; a preservation of voting rights of refugees and displaced persons; proportional election of the municipal and executive board members and cantonal governments; campaign spending limits and financial disclosure requirements; and provides for citizens' observation of the elections and a ban on paid political advertising on television and radio.

Many of the electoral innovations included in the draft Election Law by the Working Group were provided by BiH citizens through their direct participation in OSCE-sponsored Election Law Information Campaign activities, which began in March 1999.

Citizens overwhelmingly asked for more accountability of elected members in municipal Councils and Parliaments, more women's participation in politics, and more effective representation by their elected officials at the local to national levels. The OSCE will continue its outreach campaign to the public as the law progresses through the BiH parliamentary process. Copies of the Election Law can be downloaded from the OSCE BiH website at www.oscebih.org.