

OHR condemns delays in passport issuance

High Representative Carlos Westendorp is increasingly disturbed by continued delays in passport issuance, and strongly rejects all allegations that the international community bears any responsibility for these delays.

The OHR has played a key role in the support of the relevant authorities at every stage of this process, from the drafting and adoption of the Law on Travel Documents last year, which came into effect on January 1, to the process of identifying Bundesdruckerei in Berlin, Germany, as a potential supplier, to logistical and other forms of support for quick implementation.

But while the international community has treated this issue with the importance it deserves, the local authorities have unfortunately not always done likewise. Were it not for the OHR's efforts, this process would undoubtedly have faced even greater difficulties.

Minister of Civil Affairs and Communications, Spasoje Albijanic, and his Deputy Ministers Milan Krizanovic and Nudzeim Recica have repeatedly committed themselves to resolving all technical issues in association with Bundesdruckerei. But they have failed in a number of ways, for instance by approving incorrect texts for the passport covers or by causing unnecessary delays in developing the application forms. Important deadlines have been missed and extra costs have been incurred as a result.

The authorities, by their lack of professionalism, poor organizational abilities and lack of respect for the deadlines as established under the Law, have shown a lack of regard for their citizens. They clearly do not appreciate how strongly

Bosnians wish to exercise their right to travel internationally, in particular during the current holiday season.

The High Representative calls upon all relevant authorities, in particular at this advanced stage in the process upon the Entities' Ministries of Interior, to take all necessary steps in consultation with the Ministry of Civil Affairs and Communications to finalize arrangements within one week and to begin the long-delayed issuance of passports.

This process can be completed quickly if the authorities show the commitment and leadership needed.