

# OHR Discusses Concerns Over Pensions and Teachers' Pay With Union Leaders

OHR Banja Luka today held a meeting with Pensioners' Association Chairman Rade Rakulj and Education, Culture, and Sport Trade Union Chairwoman Ranka Misic to discuss their concerns about the RS Government's difficulties paying pensions and teachers' salaries on time.

At this meeting, both union leaders thanked the OHR for taking an interest in the problems of low pensions and poor pay in the RS. Ms. Misic cited the immediate need for the RS Government to pay one and a half months' salary arrears to teachers, and make arrangements for a promised 20-percent increase in teachers' salaries. Mr. Rakulj urged a speedy resolution to the dispute between the Entities over pension payments.

Both union leaders agreed that the introduction of VAT and the reform of the Customs Service, the technical details of which are now being discussed by the political parties, could help boost revenues and cut back on fraud. The OHR explained that in the medium term these reforms will allow the government to pay salaries and pensions on time and spend more money on social services and infrastructure. Under the current discredited and defrauded customs and sales-tax systems, hundreds of millions of KM that should be going to pensioners, teachers and citizens end up instead in the hands of criminals. The union leaders said they would continue to lobby the RS government to get a fair deal for teachers and pensioners and to initiate reforms without further delay. The OHR reassured them that the international community was also determined to see the root-and-branch reform of BiH's duplicatory and defrauded customs and tax systems, so that they work for the citizens not the criminals.