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Special Relations

Croatia and the BiH Federation

During August and September negotiations of the Ploce-Neum agreement, giving BiH use of Ploce port, and Croatia access through Neum, the topic of a Federation-Croatia 'special relations' agreement was revived. US Special Envoy Richard Sclar, and Principal Deputy High Representative Jacques Klein, who together facilitated the Ploce-Neum agreement, reviewed the series of unsuccessful proposals made in the past by both parties.

Much had actually been accorded in previous efforts to reach a special relationship, of the kind the Dayton Peace Agreement permits the Entities and their neighbour countries, but a few crucial issues remained unresolved.

Since several officials who would have a key role in special relations talks, were present at the Ploce-Neum negotiations, it was possible to produce a draft proposal in language acceptable to both sides. This was reviewed by the Federation leaders, and approved. When the Ploce-Neum agreement was initialled in Zagreb on 10 September, the special relations draft was also reviewed by the Croatia leadership. Negotiating teams were subsequently formed for both sides - the Federation team was of mixed ethnicity, consisting of three Bosniaks, three Croats and a Serb - and the talks started.

The agreement produced is essentially a framework, providing for the creation of numerous annexes for many diverse areas, ranging from defence and education questions to economic affairs and forestry. It was agreed that both parties should set up commissions to cooperate in developing the annexes, facilitated by the OHR, which will establish a secretariat for handling the process.

The annexes should be defined by the deadline of 1 July 1999. Thus unconstitutional and illegal agreements will be removed, together with parallel structures and non-transparent procedures. All annexes must conform with the Dayton Peace Agreement and the Constitution of BiH.

The agreement opens the way to the revival of economic links and the resolution of questions of vital mutual interest. It solidifies the relationship between the Federation and Croatia, rendering it at the same time transparent and legal. The agreement helps address the concerns of residents both of the Federation and of Croatia - and even opens the way for the formation of a similar relationship between Croatia and the Republika Srpska.

RS Politics

Republika Srpska National Assembly

The September elections results produced no clear majority within the National Assembly of the RS. Two major blocs, the alliance of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) and Serb Radical Party (SRS), and the 'Sloga' ('Harmony') coalition, hold 32 seats each out of a total of 83. However, the 'Sloga' coalition, which incorporates the Serb National Alliance (SNS), the Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), and the RS Socialist Party, has a history of cooperation with the Federation-based parties in the Assembly, and so Sloga can be viewed as the principal power bloc, under general parliamentary procedure.

Prior to the inaugural session of the RS Assembly, the High Representative sent a letter to the heads of all parties present in the Assembly, listing priority executive and legislative issues which should be given immediate consideration. The actions required from the Assembly by the HR included acceptance of laws on housing and property, amendments to amnesty legislation, amendments to the laws on internal affairs, legal practice, public order, and criminal procedure.

The action required from the RS government, once it should be constituted, centred on implementation of the Banja Luka Conference conclusions and other action directly or indirectly concerning minority returns to the RS. The requirements included implementation of the housing and property legislation, once passed; implementation and adjustment of privatisation legislation, and action on police restructuring, media reform, customs administration, and use of the state symbols of BiH.

Responding to the list of requirements, the Sloga coalition leaders accepted their urgency.

The inaugural session of the Assembly took place on 29 October, and was continued on 4 November. The 29 October session saw the adoption of the agenda, and verification of the mandates of the delegates. The reconvened session on 4 November saw the election of the Assembly's Speaker, deputy Speaker, and General Secretary, all from the ranks of the Sloga Coalition. Petar Djokic of the RS Socialist Party was re-elected as Speaker.

Also at this session the Chair of the BiH Presidency, Zivko Radisic, and new RS President Nikola Poplasen, took oaths before the Assembly, and five Serb representatives were elected for the BiH Parliament.

NAC

Addressing the North Atlantic Council on 21 October, High Representative Carlos Westendorp told its members:

'Together we are engaged in a venture of enormous significance to the international community, one in which vast political, economic and human resources have been invested. It is also, of course, a venture of even greater importance to the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina; to the neighbours of that troubled country; and to Europe. We cannot therefore contemplate failure: nor do I do so. But I believe we are now at a critical moment in the decision making process.'

The HR recalled how much had been achieved in almost three years since the General Framework Agreement for Peace was signed in Dayton:

'Freedom of movement by and large exists, thanks in large measure to the new uniform licence plate system. There is a common currency and a new flag, and other necessary symbols of nationhood...The recent elections were both peaceful and democratic. The results show a reduction in the grip of the monolithic nationalist parties and an increase in political pluralism.

'Yet a great deal remains to be accomplished. Bosnia may not now be at war: but it is certainly not yet at peace with itself.'

The HR made the following points:

- In much of the country the rule of law has yet to be established.
- The common institutions are barely able to operate on their own.
- Economic reconstruction is still at an early stage

'In all of this,' said the HR, 'time is not on our side...In short, it is make or break time.

'To date we have barely scratched the surface of minority returns to the more difficult areas...The root problem is, of course, one of ethnic insecurity. Crucial to this process is the creation of a professional, apolitical, multi-ethnic police force and an independent judiciary, so that the rule of law is genuinely effective.'

The HR stressed the importance of having in place adequate manpower, adequate funds, greater financial conditionality at the municipal level, so that obstruction of returns can be penalised and co-operation rewarded. He also laid stress on the need for an effective publicity campaign to re-establish confidence in the hearts and minds of those who want to return.

But above all, he said, what will be required is a secure environment.

'Thus far it has been a considerable success. But it is not yet over. And it is taking a little longer than we had hoped.

'Let us therefore redouble our efforts. Let us persevere, despite the frustrations. Let us keep our promise to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to ourselves, to build a lasting peace in their country.'

BiH Presidency

Prior to its inaugural session, October 13, the members of the re-constituted BiH Presidency, Ante Jelavic, Alija Izetbegovic, and Zivko Radisic, held a first, informal session. The members agreed on forming a working group to propose a new structure for the Council of Ministers, and a working group was formed to focus on improving the work of the Presidency. At this session it was also resolved that future sessions of the Presidency will take place every second Tuesday in the government building in Marijin Dvor, Sarajevo, reconstructed by the European Union.

The Presidency held its inaugural session on 13 October, and President Alija Izetbegovic handed over the position of Presidency Chairman's position to President Zivko Radisic.

Speaking at the ceremony, Principle Deputy High Representative Jacques Klein addressed the three presidents:

'The eyes of the people of this nation are on you, the members of the Presidency inaugurated here today. Some look to you with confidence; others with anxiety; one or two - perhaps slightly more than one or two; that is how it is in a democracy - with a touch of scepticism. But all look to you with hope.. that the pledges which you have made ..will mean better lives and a brighter future for all of them, wherever they come from, whatever their ethnic origins.

'The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina know that they cannot change the past; still less can they dare to forget it. But they know they can shape the future. They have entrusted that task to you.'

Klein complimented the new Presidency members on the success of their first informal session together, at which the issue of the future venue for Presidency meetings was settled. He expressed hopes that the Presidents would be able to address all the issues which confront them in the future with equal professionalism - including changes to the Rules of Procedure governing the Presidency, and action to promote the efficiency of the common institutions of BiH.

'This morning, you pledged to work with dedication and commitment for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to work fully to implement the Dayton accords. And in return we make this pledge to you: ...We will share the burden with you. But we look to you to lead the way, to chart the route and to set the pace. We hope it will be a brisk one.'

Council of Ministers

The 23 October session of the Council of Ministers was presided over by Co-Chair Boro Bosic. The decisions passed included agreement that BiH would accept the proposal offered by the Paris Club for reprogramming of BiH debt repayment, at the talks scheduled for 27-29 October between the Paris Club and a delegation of CoM representatives.

BiH Foreign Minister Jadranko Prlic reported on the progress on the re-organization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as part of the process of implementing the Law on the Council of Ministers. High-level officials should be shortly appointed for the MFA; a list of appropriate staff had been agreed upon; dismissals and the introduction of new staff were enabling the required number and ethnic composition of employees to be reached.

The MFA committed itself to providing the CoM with a report on its budgetary difficulties.

The CoM members agreed on sending a letter to the Entity Ministries of the Interior requesting that they abide by the principles of the Amendments to the Law on Immunity, as approved by the CoM prior to the elections. This arrangement was subsequently endorsed by the High Representative. These amendments are awaiting adoption by the BiH Parliament at its first post-electoral session.

On the topic of flight control the CoM requested OHR assistance in dismantling the former Directorate for Civil Aviation of the Republic of BiH, and was assured by the representatives of the present DCA that the OHR as well as SFOR is already engaged in this issue.

Paris Club Agreement

The outcome of the BiH delegation's journey to meet the Paris Club creditors and to discuss debt reprogramming for BiH, met with a warm welcome from the High Representative. The agreement signed on 28 October in Paris between the Paris Club creditor countries and BiH offers 67% debt forgiveness, as previously, but with a cut-off date of 1992, and with repayment terms including a six-year grace period.

The HR praised the agreement for taking into account BiH's specific post-war and post-communist situation as well as the efforts of the country's government and the international community to create a sound economic environment in BiH.

By signing this agreement, BiH has saved more than US\$ 1 billion, reduced the remaining debts to acceptable amounts and spread the repayment over more than 30 years. The High Representative Carlos Westendorp is very grateful to the creditor countries for their understanding and generosity.

CoM-Structure Working Group

The first session of the newly reconstituted BiH Presidency founded a Working Group with the aim of discussing possible restructuring of the CoM. This body met on 2 November, and its members, who include representatives of the three constituent peoples, discussed in detail possible changes to the chairmanship and number of ministries. This issue will be discussed by the Steering Board on November 17th and the next meeting of the working group will be held on November 23rd.

SCMM

The Standing Committee on Military Matters (SCMM) held its first session following the elections on 27 October, at the building of the Institutions of BiH. The session was chaired by newly elected Chair of the Presidency Zivko Radisic. Of significance were the signing of a protocol on cross IEBL flights and initial discussions on amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the SCMM.

Customs Fraud

EC CAFAO

The European Commission Customs and Fiscal Assistance Office (EC CAFAO) has announced the latest in a series of successful actions against customs fraud, undertaken by the BiH customs administrations of both Entities with assistance from the EC CAFAO.

The action concerns the breaking of a fraud racket which would have meant the loss to BiH of approximately 40 million KM in import duty. Given the scale of the racket's operations, it would, if continued, have cost BiH approximately 100 million KM in import duties, on an annual basis.

The Entity Customs Administrations and EC CAFAO cooperated together on gathering information on 150 trucks involved in importing 900 consignments of goods via the Brcko and Orasje crossings without paying duties. The racket has been successfully exposed and broken, again due to cooperation between the Entity Customs Administrations, facilitated by EC CAFAO.

CAFAO was originally conceived by the EC, which continues to fund and manage the agency. Established in 1996 to help BiH authorities implement customs-related provisions of the Dayton Agreement, EC CAFAO is dedicated to ensuring that the treasuries of both Entities and the State have a reliable budget source from customs revenues.

The EC has facilitated the drafting and passing of legislation for state-level customs policy which accords with EU standards, and makes BiH a unified customs area. EC CAFAO has assisted in structuring the customs administration of the two Entities, and in setting functional border controls.

Officials of the EC CAFAO are present at the border administration offices, and in addition to supervising correct implementation of customs policy, are able to monitor the flow of trade across the borders of BiH. Due to this

presence the EC CAFAO is able to compile data for use in the ongoing battle against the large-scale customs fraud.

Combating this fraud will restore to BiH much of the income that should accrue from duty payments, and will contribute to the independent financing of the joint institutions, as well as to the prosperity of BiH.

Media

Journalists' Association MoU

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) facilitated the unprecedented collaboration of the five main journalists' associations of BiH – two RS associations, one Federation-based association, and two BiH associations. The five met in conference in Sarajevo on 19 October, and under the chairmanship of the International Federation of Journalists the presidents of the five associations signed a joint Memorandum of Understanding.

This proclaims their belief that urgent action is required to promote journalistic solidarity in defence of professional journalism and freedom of expression throughout the territory of BiH. It also stresses their demand that the International Community should involve the entire BiH community of journalists in the elaboration and implementation of media policy and new regulations in BiH.

'We acknowledge that divisions among journalists and media workers have themselves contributed to problems of consultation, and have led also to a lack of professional solidarity in the face of problems which are common to all journalists within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Therefore, in recognising the need to cooperate greater promotion and solidarity, we agree..that we will work together with relevant international and national partners in support of activities to strengthen media and to enhance the status of professional journalism.'

RTV BiH Update

The new Board of Governors of Radio-Television BiH ([RTV BiH](#)) is currently studying proposals for the establishment of a Federation network, with the aim of fully enfranchising the Bosnian Croat community of the Federation. Cooperation with Bosnian Croat broadcasters is already on the increase, with sports programming from the Croat majority areas of Herzegovina now being shown. Some other notable developments have also taken place: the appearance of Bosnian Serb member of the Presidency Zivko Radisic in a talk-show, was the first time the Serb member of the BiH Presidency has ever entered the studio. Also, a reporter based in Banja Luka now adds greatly to the quality of the coverage of RS news.

Returns

Sarajevo Declaration

The High Representative Carlos Westendorp remains disappointed with the progress achieved in implementing the Sarajevo Declaration. It is clear that the target of 20,000 minority returns to the city will not be met this year.

However, while estimates of how many minority returns have taken place vary, it is clear that return is happening. There are also indications that the available housing space in Sarajevo needs to be expanded to make room for more returns.

That is why the High Representative has recommended to the European Commission to lift the freeze on funding projects that are designed to create additional accommodation.

Yet the authorities must redouble their efforts to implement the Sarajevo Declaration in full, and must give more support to the Sarajevo Housing Committee.

In particular, Ambassador Westendorp expects them to have resolved satisfactorily all the individual cases listed in

the Sarajevo Declaration by the time the Peace Implementation Council meets in Madrid on December 15 and 16. He also expects the authorities to resolve issues such as the use of military apartments. Further, he insists that the Sarajevo Education Working Group be given full support and recent difficulties over the textbook review be resolved.

The High Representative has asked for a full review of the results of the implementation of the Sarajevo Declaration to be prepared in advance of the Madrid Conference. The results of this review will determine the view that he and the donor community take on future aid to Sarajevo. The International Community will not continue to invest in new housing, if abuse of the existing housing stock continues.

Return and Reconstruction Task Force - Planning for 1999

As the Madrid PIC approaches, the RRTF is holding a series of external and internal planning meetings, including an OHR Returns Roundtable in Brussels on 6 November, to formulate an action plan that will be presented to the Steering Board meeting on 17 November.

On 4-5 November the European Commission will chair an informal meeting on assistance to review efforts and discuss future coordination for the coming year, and UNHCR have convened a meeting of the Humanitarian Issues Working Group for 20 November.

Cross-border efforts

The Return Facilitation Group, the OSCE-UNHCR chaired counterpart to RRTF in Croatia, met for a second time on 14 October and the RFG is currently reviewing implementation of the Government of Croatia's "Return Programme".

At the field level three "Area Return Facilitation Groups" (ARFG's) have been formed based in Osijek, Knin and Sisak.

The NW RRTF met with the Sisak ARFG on 21 October to discuss future cooperation on cross-border issues, with particular regard to Croatian Serbs in the Western RS originally from the Western Slavonia and Kordun regions. There are plans for a long-awaited donor conference for Croatia, on reconstruction and development, to be held on 4-5 December.

Returns to Eastern RS

19 October saw a small Bosniac group return to the village of Zivojevici in the municipality of Srpsko Gorazde. The village is fairly isolated, with better access to the Federation than to the nearest town in the Republika Srpska but ECHO, GOAL, IMG, UNHCR Gorazde UNIPTF and SFOR have given material assistance and assisted in house reconstruction to prepare for return to this area.

Klisa: small steps

International and local efforts to seek progress for Bosniac DPs trying to return to the Klisa settlement in the Zvornik municipality have resulted in a programme for small-scale house-cleaning that started on October 19. A group of ten residents have visited the village daily to clear and prepare damaged houses for spring reconstruction. Local RS police have provided security monitored by UN IPTF and with an SFOR presence.

Central Bosnia Canton: looking ahead

On 27 October Deputy HR for Reconstruction and Return, Andy Bearpark, addressed Central Bosnia Canton officials and Mayors in Travnik. He reviewed progress on return in the Canton over the last year, sought a clear commitment from the Cantonal government to return in 1999 and emphasised the importance of keeping CBC open due to the return axes linking it to the Herzegovina Neretva Canton and other areas.

He took note of encouraging return movements in 1998 in the municipalities of Jajce, Travnik, Novi Travnik, Bugojno, Vitez, and Busovaca but stressed that outright misinformation on return possibilities to the Canton must stop. While the RRTF aims to assist Cantonal and local authorities to plan for return, he also noted that the right to return is unconditional, the process is a dynamic one and the international community will continue to support returns wherever they take place.

The RRTF will arrange a roundtable on 12 November, in Travnik, to review implementation of the Cantonal Return Plan and to discuss in detail with cantonal authorities the way ahead for 1999.

Derventa: a clean sweep

Following sustained OHR intervention and in co-operation with UN IPTF Regional HQ Doboj/Human Rights as well as OSCE and UNHCR Doboj, the head of the local office of the Ministry of Displaced Persons and Refugees, Mr. Poparic along with its entire staff were replaced on 2 Oct by the Derventa Municipal authorities.

Mr. Poparic and his counterparts were known to have been involved in several cases of corruption in the allocation of housing and reconstruction assistance, and the municipal authorities nominated a list of new candidates, approved by the BL ministry of DPs and refugees, both for the office and for the municipal commission for refugees and DPs.

The new staff will start working at the beginning of November but will meet beforehand with the representatives of OHR, OSCE, UNHCR and UNIPTF. IC representatives will provide a list of priorities cases to be solved by the new members of the commission.

Human Rights

Serious Return-Related Incidents in Capljina

On 1 October, a group of Bosnian Croats set up a roadblock on the M-17, south of Mostar. The demonstration was aimed at preventing the return of a group of 50 Bosniak displaced persons to their homes in Tasovcici, in Capljina. The barricade was lifted following the intervention of the Multi-National Special Unit.

UNMIBH reports a series of violent incidents on 2 October targeting the return process of displaced persons in the village of Tasovcici, near Capljina, including five explosions, two house burnings, the ill-treatment of a member of the Federal Assembly and President of the Cantonal Board of the SDA by Bosnian Croat local police in Capljina and the arrest of two Bosniak police officers by Bosnian Croat local police. In addition, a UN IPTF monitor was physically removed from the Capljina police station when inquiring about the detention of the Bosniak police officers. One Bosniak returnee was killed and five others injured in the violence, including two Bosnian Croat police officers who were assisting victims of one of the explosions.

On 8 October, the IPTF Commissioner, in consultation with the SRSG, decertified the Chief of the Capljina Police Administration, Stanislav Buntic, following IPTF findings of serious police misconduct at the Capljina Police Administration.

Detention of two journalists in Capljina

The Media Experts Commission reports the detention of two Feral Tribune journalists. The two journalists were apprehended on a hill near Capljina and taken to a police station, where they were surrounded by approximately 20-25 police officers. The journalists were asked why they did not report to the local police before entering the area. After being released from the police station, the journalists immediately traveled to the UNIPTF station and made a statement.

The Feral Tribune is a well-known Croatian opposition newspaper, which has been subject to repeated harassment by the Croatian authorities.

For further details on the current human rights situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, please see HRCC Human Rights Monthly Reports which are available in English and Bosnian on the OHR Web Site (<https://www.ohr.int/hr.htm>).

Exhumations

As of March 1998 until the present date, exhumation activities have been carried out at over two hundred sites, and approximately 1 300 bodies exhumed. All three sides are now working with several teams – the Bosniak side, for example, now has four teams working simultaneously. There are encouraging prospects of cooperation between the teams belonging to the different ethnic groups. Meanwhile, all procedures surrounding exhumation are increasingly well-established and running smoothly.

The latest large-scale operation in BiH took place near the town of Zvornik in the RS, between 6 and 11 October. 274 bodies were exhumed from a single grave, victims of ethnic cleansing carried out in 1992.

The local RS police showed an outstanding level of cooperation, providing 24 hour coverage for the site, for which they were thanked by Principal Deputy High Representative Jacques Klein, who visited the site. Klein also thanked SFOR for patrolling the site several times a day, providing extra security. Thanks were similarly due to the Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), for sending several representatives to help extract bodies from the grave.

Brcko

Returns

On September 16th, a meeting was held in the municipal building in Ravne Brcko (a Croat majority area in the Federation side of the pre-war Brcko Opstina) with the aim of encouraging the return of Croats to their pre-war homes in the Brcko area that now lies north of the IEBL.

Although a total of 1.209 families (mostly Bosniak) have returned to the area of the Brcko Opstina that now falls within the Republika Srpska and is under international supervision, only 26 of those are Croat.

Mr. Kresimir Zubak, then still a member of the BiH Presidency, took part in the meeting, together with Brcko Supervisor, Robert W. Farrand, the head of the Roman Catholic Church in BiH, Vinko Cardinal Puljic, the Mayor of Ravne Brcko, Mr. Mijo Anic, the Deputy Mayor of the Brcko Multiethnic Administration, Ivan Krndelj, and the Ulice (a former Croat area within the RS Brcko Opstina) parish priest, Father Gabriel Tomic.

All of these addressed a crowd of about 200 Croat refugees and potential returnees.

Supervisor Farrand expressed his concern that the Croats have not taken the opportunity to return. "As a young man -he said-I lived in the US in a town near the border with Canada. I know something about good farmland. The farmers in my town were very attached to the land. When it comes to fertility of the soil, you have excellent land. It's been laying fallow for six years. It's ready to receive your ploughs again" He added: "I really think it is time to consider seriously to return to the area of supervision. This is like a game in which a very important part of the team is not on the field, playing".

President Zubak told the gathering that "our homes can be destroyed, but our desire for return cannot" and pointed out that "Brcko is one of the keys tofor the reintegration of BiH". "Our permanent interest -he added- is to return to the settlements we were displaced from. Without your return, without your influence, there will be no positive changes in the RS".

Vinko Cardinal Puljic strongly advocated the return option. "The bread you eat in your home -he told his audience- is sweeter than the bread you eat somewhere else".

A similar meeting was held on October 17th , also in the Ravne Brcko Municipality, with about 150 potential returnees to Markovic Polje, Gorice, Krepsic and Drenova (all Croat areas, pre-war, now north of the IEBL). Again Supervisor Farrand, Mayor Anic, Brcko Deputy Mayor Ivan Krndelj, and Father Peric, the parish priest of Gorice, answered questions posed by the audience, most of them relating to security, reconstruction aid and infrastructure.

On October 10th, Ambassador Farrand held a meeting in the OHR building in Brcko with about 80 representatives

of the Bosniac returnees and potential returnees to the present RS areas of the Brcko Opstina. The community leaders expressed their concerns and raised multiple issues. Again, the returns policy, and questions of security, the economy, and infrastructure, as well as the prospects for the future, were the main topics.

Ambassador Farrand pointed out that the pace of the approval of returns by the Returns Commission has increased lately, from around 30 or 40 every two weeks, to 140 and more every week.

Publicity Campaign

Following the Order on Return to Unoccupied Property in the RS Municipality of Brcko, issued by the Supervisor Robert W. Farrand on August 24th, the Executive Board of the Brcko Municipality is now conducting, under the guidelines provided by OHR-North, a widespread public information campaign on the right to return and the procedures for two-way return.

Supervisory Orders

On 3 November Brcko Supervisor Robert W. Farrand issued two Supervisory Orders. The first of these Orders deals with the return of non-Serb members of the Municipal Assembly, Administration, Police, Judiciary and others to their pre-war homes of origin in Brcko.

The Municipal Government is ordered to take the necessary steps to return all those non-Serb pre-war residents of Brcko, who were evicted from their homes during the war but who remained in Brcko, by December 15, 1998.

The Municipal Government, is also required to investigate and report on all cases of multiple occupancy and multiple claims.

The second Order deals with the outstanding cases of article 17 of the Republika Srpska Law on Use of Abandoned Property, internally displaced Brcko residents and cases of multiple occupancy.

Both orders were sent to the Brcko Municipal Government on 4 November 1998, and come into effect immediately.

Economy

On September 25th, OHR-North issued an information sheet on International Aid and Economic Development in the Brcko area. More than 110 million DM have been pledged for projects in the Brcko area. Of those, 85 million DM are for projects that are now completed or on-going. CARE-BiH, the World Bank, UNHCR, the European Commission, ECHO, USAID, The International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps/Scottish European Aid, and the Governments of Italy, UK, Norway, Canada, and the US are among the main donors.

Electronews

Return Power

One of the problems that has emerged as a key obstacle to returns by refugees and displaced persons is the absence of electrical power supply to their former homes, and the expense of re-installing it.

Even houses that have been reconstructed to a habitable condition for returns usually lack cable links to a supply line, a roof mast, a distribution box, and a meter. The initial expense of purchasing and installing these hook-up components is often too great for returnees, and the Electro-distribution companies are not themselves in a position to cover the costs. Consequently, the companies are unable to sell their surplus supplies of electricity, while potential returns are severely discouraged.

Mr Nick Vrkljan, Senior Energy Adviser to the OHR Economic Department, with strong support from Deputy High Representative for Economic Affairs, Didier Fau, and Deputy High Representative for Reconstruction and Returns, Andy Bearpark, is engaged in trying to resolve the problem.

The Entity Ministers of Energy, Industry and Mines have been asked for agreement on the principle that a unified price can be established for all of the hook-up components. This price should apply throughout BiH.

Once this principle is agreed on, it will be possible for the Electro-distribution companies to draw up plans for the number and location of houses in each Entity in need of electrical supply. This will enable estimate of the amount of hook-up equipment needed throughout BiH, thus making in-bulk purchases a possibility.

Commercial banks as well as such major contributors to BiH programmes as USAID, the EBRD, and the World Bank will be approached, to discuss the possibility of loans to Elektroprivredas for purchase of the equipment.

The components would then be installed in individual residences by the Electro-distribution companies, and the returnees required to make, in addition to their electricity bill, small monthly payments on the equipment.

The payments would be collected and returned via the Electro-distribution companies to the lending banks, thus ultimately repaying the original loans.

The benefits of this scheme, if implemented, would be far-reaching. The encouragement to return would not be by any means the only result – the whole BH power industry would prosper from the boost to distribution.

As all the components can be fabricated by the local companies there is a good possibility that if they win the contract, this additional work load may create new employment opportunities in both Entities.

Diary

17 November:

PIC Steering Board, Brussels.

See our Chronology for a full list of activities

The OHR Bulletin is produced by the Public Affairs Department of the Office of the High Representative in Sarajevo and aims to give an overview of what is happening on the ground in the civilian implementation of the Dayton Agreement.

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