OHR’s Statement at the International Agencies’ Joint Press Conference

Political Agreement on Police Reform Has Already Been Reached

BiH Foreign Minister Ivanic and RS Prime Minister Dodik have recently suggested that there is a need for new political negotiations on police reform.

There isn’t.

Last autumn political agreement was reached. This was endorsed by the two Entity parliaments and by the BiH Parliament. In this Agreement, all parties committed themselves to the formation of a Police Reform Directorate. The Directorate was then established by the Council of Ministers. In line with the Political Agreement, the Directorate is currently engaged in the technical work of drafting a proposed implementation plan for police reform.

RS representatives, like all political actors in BiH, must recall that the Political Agreement and the subsequent Council of Ministers Decision were recognised by the European Union. It was on this basis that the EU instructed the European Commission to launch the SAA negotiations, to begin the formal process of BiH’s integration with the European Union.

The Political Agreement states that the Entity and State governments need to adopt the plan produced by the Directorate. So, while Governments and Parliaments will have the opportunity to debate the Directorate’s report after the elections, their discussions will be on that report and no other.

The RS has three months, a short window of opportunity, to

shape the process of Police reform in the Directorate. This is crucial as there will not be another technical process.

If the RS authorities seriously want to shape the outcome of police reform, to reach a successful conclusion of SAA negotiations, and the relaxation of the visa regime they must seize the opportunity that now exists.

Now is the time to work constructively to give citizens better policing – suggesting that new political negotiations could be launched is inconsistent with the undertakings given by the RS parties to the political agreement, will not further the interests of BiH and contributes precisely nothing to the wellbeing of its citizens.

Governments Have to Live Within Their Means

Yesterday it was announced that this year BiH exports increased by 37 percent, while the value of imports increased by 3 percent. This is very positive news. The country is paying its way. In addition, government coffers have benefited to the tune of millions as a result of the successful introduction of VAT.

However, the International Monetary Fund has warned that the present tide of pre-election spending could produce a post-election hangover, with the authorities forced to cut back programmes and services because of a shortage of funds.

The governments – just like individual citizens – are constrained by a basic fact of economic life: you can only spend what you earn. At the same time, you must make sure that you spend what you earn wisely.

Clearly, expenditure should be aimed at long-term benefits for citizens, not short-term vote- seeking. In this regard I would point to a new initiative in the State Parliament to

amend the agreed legislative package to compensate frozen foreign currency savers. The proposal cuts the payment time to five years – but this is a promise that can not be kept. The existing package represents the best possible compensation under BiH’s economic circumstances. The amendment would saddle the country with billions in additional commitments that it could not possibly honour – a result that would not benefit citizens in general and foreign currency savers in particular.