

OHR's Statement at the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference in Banja Luka

High Representative Proposes Closer OHR-OSCE Working Relationship

The High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, remains in Vienna today, following two days of deliberations by the Political Directors of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board. This morning the High Representative will address representatives of the 55 participating states of the OSCE, at the organisation's Permanent Council.

The High Representative will discuss ways of optimizing the working relationship between the OHR and the OSCE. As the OHR downsizes - it has already gone from more than 800 staff members to just over 300 in the last two years - its operational capacity and its methods of working have changed substantially. The OSCE, by contrast, will have a permanent and substantial engagement with Bosnia and Herzegovina and currently is the only one of the international organisations to maintain an extensive field network in the country.

Therefore the High Representative will today propose the creation of a Working Group, under the co-chairmanship of Senior Deputy High Representative Peter Bas-Backer, to co-ordinate in a "continuous and productive way" OHR-OSCE activities in the fields of elections, education, human rights and justice reform.

"We can only move forward in broad policy areas with the support of the entire International Community - and in several areas only with the specific support of the OSCE," the High Representative points out in his speech. "Better co-ordination between my Office's top-down and the OSCE's bottom-up approach in the non-governmental sector, particularly in terms of providing each other with available expertise and resources, could significantly contribute to the development of an informed, active and engaged civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina."

In his remarks, the High Representative emphasises the importance of the outcome of the general elections scheduled for this October. "This will determine the success or failure of Bosnia and Herzegovina's transition to a market economy and its final push for Euro-Atlantic integration, ultimately for membership of the EU and NATO," he notes.

The High Representative also discusses his top policy priority - promoting the faster economic development of BiH and working to ensure that real benefits from economic reform are

delivered to citizens. He notes that “We are in a race: poverty and unemployment versus political stability,” and he says that he will focus his energies on promoting further improvements to the business environment and attracting investment to BiH. I have brought along copies of the speech.

PDHR Hails Improved Standing of BiH’s Fully Professional Armed Forces

The modern and professional BiH armed forces are an asset for the whole country and have been brought into the mainstream of national life, the Principal Deputy High Representative, Larry Butler, will point out in a speech to be delivered to officers in Sarajevo tomorrow.

“Fully professional armed forces under the democratic direction of the state are the European norm,” Ambassador Butler will point out. “Yet modernizing the armed forces isn’t simply another box to be ‘ticked off’ in the succession of reforms that are taking BiH back into the European mainstream. The Armed Forces have a particular and profound importance for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, beyond perhaps the importance they customarily attach to other institutions. In a very tangible way the armed forces represent the country. If the Armed Forces are efficient and effective, not only can they play their allotted role of ensuring BiH’s security, they can also, in many different ways, reflect and support the progress that the country has made in its postwar recovery and transition.”

Ambassador Butler will point out that “as the role and nature of the Armed Forces changes in the post-conscription era the level of popular esteem for the Armed Forces will also change. The army can come to be seen as a respected, confident, and positive part of national life,” and that “as BiH begins to participate more actively in international diplomacy the country’s capacity to deploy military units in humanitarian and peace support operations will increasingly have to be augmented – and here too a range of specialized and highly developed skills will have to be available in the Armed Forces.”

The full text of Ambassador Butler’s speech, at the at the Peace Support Operations Training Centre in Sarajevo, will be posted on our website tomorrow.