

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

Failure of Police Reform: Where We Go from Here

Following the collapse of police reform negotiations in Sarajevo earlier this week, when the RS representatives pulled back from commitments they had made during the talks in Vlasice, the aspirations of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens to move closer to Europe – and derive all the real benefits that will come with that – have suffered a severe setback.

The RS representatives refused to accept the European Commission's three principles, which require a BiH police service where:

- all legislative and budgetary competencies are vested at State Level,
- police areas are drawn up on the grounds of functionality, and
- there is no political interference in policing.

That means that policing regions must cross the IEBL where necessary and where necessary.

These principles are not going to change. BiH will not get into Europe until these principles have been formally accepted. The question is how long will citizens have to wait.

The failure to meet the European Commission's requirements is obviously a major disappointment to citizens. Opinion polls show that the majority of citizens in RS want to join the EU.

But the opportunity has not been lost completely. There is still a chance of success. The RSNA can limit the damage and get the process back on track. In order to do that, the RSNA will have to accept the European Commission's three principles. By doing so it will clear the way towards fulfilling the European aspirations of hundreds of thousands of citizens.

The High Representative has made it clear that he cannot and will not impose the solution. The High Representative has also made it clear that the political parties need to show that they are capable of serving the long-term interests of the people of this country.

It is the people who have to put up with endemic poverty, inadequate social services, a decrepit infrastructure and rampant crime – while politicians engage in grandstanding and brinksmanship. The opposition parties and the ruling parties must understand that opportunities to do the right thing are not infinite. Politicians need to seize the opportunities that Europe offers.

The objective is to get into Europe, end poverty, raise living standards, fight crime and create a future for the people of BiH. On Monday, that objective moved further away. The RSNA has it in its power to bring it closer again.