

PDHR Hays Calls for Greater Cantonal Role in Combating Floods, Illegal Logging

Flooding and illegal logging can only be tackled effectively if all levels of government below the Entity level are included in planning and implementing solutions, Principal Deputy High Representative Donald Hays told Cantonal prime ministers at a meeting at the OHR today.

“There are a number of reasons, both climatic and human, which have made this year’s flooding the worst for years,” Ambassador Hays said. “The misuse of natural resources through the clearing of large areas of forest, and the excavation of river beds continue to be sources of corruption, political funding, and social misery in Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

The two *Vodoprivedas* actions are frequently not in harmony in the Federation, and there are serious concerns about the financial viability, sustainability and accountability of the present water-management set-up, Ambassador Hays said. “Under the current Water Law, 80 percent of tariff collection goes to the Federation and the *Vodoprivedas*, leaving only 20 percent to the Cantonal governments.” He called for a more ambitious and effective reform of water-management than is envisaged under the amendments to the Water Law currently before the Federation Parliament. “The solution to this problem requires a complete overhaul of water-related legislation. Restructuring the *Vodoprivedas* along commercial lines and increasing transparency in water revenues is an urgent matter,” he said.

Ambassador Hays noted that since 1998, major donors have been working with the Entity governments to implement the EU Water Framework Directive, which, among other things, places greater

management at Canton level. He called on the Cantons to overcome any obstruction to this initiative, which, he said, will markedly improve water management in the Federation.

Specifically, he called on the Cantons along the Una-Sana, the Bosna, the Neretva, the Vrbas, the Drina, and the Sava to establish links with one another in order to manage water resources jointly, under EU Directives.

Noting that the Federation government has so far failed to tackle effectively the problem of illegal logging, Ambassador Hays presented to the Prime Ministers a draft BiH Law on Sustainable Forestry, based on recommendations from the Bulldozer Committee and local experts. The law, which will be presented to Minister for Foreign Trade and Economic Relations Dragan Doko next week, introduces a framework for the certification of forestry products, and a viable regime for exporting sustainably-produced timber and wood products.

"Control of illegal logging is a stubborn problem, at the same time representing a huge economic loss to BiH, as well as an ongoing environmental tragedy," Ambassador Hays said. "Immediate measures are needed to protect the forests of BiH and make it much harder for illegal sawmills to operate and export."