

Transcript of the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference

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OHR

Members of Parliament Must Understand Simple Arithmetic

BiH politicians have to stop living in a separate world where the rules of arithmetic apparently do not apply, the Principal Deputy High representative, Larry Butler, said today. PDHR Butler was commenting on the decision by the Administrative Commission of the BiH House of Representatives to approve the draft Law on Rights and Duties of MPs.

If enacted, this law that would give members of parliament benefits and pensions that are far beyond those enjoyed by members of the public. The proposed law would allow all parliamentarians who have been elected to the Parliamentary Assembly since 1996 to have more favourable retirement conditions than any other BiH citizen, and MPs would be eligible for these benefits after serving just two years in parliament.

Not only is the proposed law fundamentally unjust, it would also be ruinously expensive, PDHR Butler said. "This issue is not just about whether these people deserve generous benefits and extraordinarily high pensions, it's about whether BiH can afford to pay for these perks, and the clear answer to that is that it *cannot* afford it. This would cost citizens an extra 2

million KM every year, at least!”

PDHR Butler noted that the proposed Law is part of a pattern of unsustainable spending which, if it were continued, would drive a gaping hole through the public finances of BiH. “ The seeds of economic ruin are being sown because of a refusal by politicians to accept basic fiscal arithmetic – you cannot pay out what you do not have in your treasury. Existing pensions are not being paid on time, so where is the money going to come from for the additional liabilities that the State and Entity authorities are signing up to?”

The PDHR called for BiH Parliamentarians to wait for the legislation dealing with remuneration being prepared by the BiH Treasury Ministry. The Treasury Ministry is now completing a Law on Salaries in the BiH institutions, which will rationalize compensation paid to BiH parliamentarians and civil servants and bring these into line with compensation paid by the Entities. This is also an IMF requirement.

OSCE

Implementation of the Ombudsman Law Still Remains the Primary Challenge

The OSCE Mission to BiH would like to express satisfaction regarding the efforts that the current state and entity Ombudsmen have been undertaking to meet the requirements of the recently adopted Law on Amendments to the Law on the Ombudsman. However, the primary challenge still remains in the implementation of this legislation.

The OSCE expects that by the end of 2006, the country will have a single State-level Ombudsman Institution. This is both a priority in the European Commission’s Feasibility Study as well as BiH’s post-accession commitment to the Council of Europe.

The Mission strongly believes that any deviation from the implementation of the law, including the early selection of the new Ombudsmen, would be detrimental both to the transitional process and to a transparent appointment procedure. It would undermine the basic principles of the new Ombudsman legislation on which the BiH Parliament worked, with the assistance of the international community, for almost two years.

A critical first step in this reform is setting out a transitional process, whereby the three currently operating institutions will be gradually merged into a single State-level Ombudsman Office. According to the law, the currently serving state and entity Ombudsmen must come up with a coordinated plan of action within six-months, draft the initial framework of the future single institution, and harmonise their practices and the methodology of work.

Most crucial to the reform, however, is a transparent appointment process of new ombudsmen for the merged institution. This appointment process should take place after the transitional process is complete and the new institution's operational procedures are set in place.

The OSCE has always considered the Ombudsman Institution as a fundamental mechanism for the protection of human rights and the promotion of good governance. The Mission remains constructively engaged in this process and urges the BiH authorities to finalise the reform process in accordance with the country's international commitments and in the best interests of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

ICTY

No statement.