

Transcript of the Senior Deputy High Representative's Press Conference with the Representatives of youth branches of BiH political parties presenting the Youth Policy Platform

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Martin Ney

Ladies and gentleman from the media,

thank you very much for coming today and I am very sorry about the delay; this is an important event because today we will present to you the Youth Policy Platform. It is this document that we will be presenting to you today.

The young politicians that you see here standing next to me, together with their colleagues from 14 parties have been working since July on creating this document. It does not matter which parties these young people come from, as this was agreed to be a non-partisan activity. They are here as representatives of the young population of this country that wishes to make a change in issues related to youth. They have proved that young politicians can work together across party lines. It is their achievement. OHR was simply the initiator and facilitator of the process, not the author of this document. The Platform consists of four sets of issues that were identified as burning problems to be promptly addressed in this country:

- Employment;
- Education;
- Social welfare and health; and
- Institutional demands.

Let me briefly address what we mean:

Employment – it contains requests for better job opportunities, non-discrimination of young employees, internship programs, benefits and credit opportunities.

Education – focusing on the Higher Education Law, the Bologna process, the creation of a national higher education strategy, the harmonization of curricula in primary and secondary schools, the establishment of research funds and etc.

Social welfare and health – requesting a State Coordinator for prevention of drug abuse, return of youth houses to their original function, and adoption of legislation on sports.

Institutional demands – asking for the creation of governmental bodies at all levels of authorities for dealing with youth issues.

I will now give the floor to Srđan Todorović to present employment, to Nina Malović to present education and to Adnan Bogunić to introduce social policy as well as the institutional demands.

First Srđan Todorović, please.

Srđan Todorović

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the press for coming here today and for giving us the opportunity to present our work to the public.

We have developed a Youth Policy Platform in which we have identified unemployment as one of the most important factors contributing to the problems the youth of this country faces

and is certainly one of the most important reasons why young people wish to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina . I also think that employment is one of the strongest factors that affects other negative occurrences and problems the youth face, such as drug abuse, crime and so on. Therefore we consider that the lack of employment opportunities one of the main causes of other negative occurrences in our society. For that reason we have developed some basic guidelines on how we think the problems of the youth, including unemployment, should be solved.

We feel that it is first necessary to adopt a Law on internships and the employment of young people. We do have one positive example, in the Council of Ministers something similar has been passed and adopted. I think that this should also be done in all the other state institutions and across all levels of government, thus obligating state institutions to employ above all interns, as well as young people, through standard job application procedures.

We feel that it is important to establish benefits for those employers and companies that employ young people. First of all I think this should be done by imposing an obligation on employers to hire young people in order to prevent things such as the following from occurring – for example in Republica Srpska, the Bureau of Employment has been providing certain benefits to employers who hire young people, however at the same time employers have had no obligation to employ these young people on a long-term basis. So, what has been happening is that employers hire young people for a month and reap the benefits, then let the young people go and hire others in order to receive more benefits – so basically taking advantage of both the benefits and the young people.

We think that the Civil Service Agency must define certain criteria that should be adhered to during the job application procedure, as we consider that the terms and conditions of employment in state institutions are usually rigged and

automatically disqualify young people by requiring work experience and thus the young people are trapped in a vicious circle –they do not have the necessary work experience and cannot get the work experience since no one will employ them without it. It is for these reasons that I think the Agency should establish standard employment criteria that should be adhered to in general. We also think that it is possible and necessary to set up funds across all levels of government for providing special loans to young people, such as business start-up loans, with the aim of [promoting] self-employment.

Those are some of the basic guidelines that we have set out in our Platform for how we propose the issue of unemployment could be solved. In the other part of the Platform, which we will present to you later, there are certain operational guidelines for solving these problems.

I would also like to use this opportunity to criticize the Council of Ministers and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, as we have unsuccessfully been trying to contact them in order to arrange a meeting and present this Platform to them. We have so far not been able to do so. I think this alone is evidence enough of the passive and depressing attitude this country has towards its youth. I also think that the fact that this meeting, and the drafting of this Platform, was initiated and organized by the Office of the High Representative is embarrassing for our Government and reflects their stance on youth issues. Thank you.

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Martin Ney

Let's look at this positively – somebody establishes a Platform and to have a process going among politicians themselves. So let's hear Nina Malović.

Nina Malović

Good afternoon. Today I will briefly inform you of the problems we identified in this Platform relating to education.

Firstly, I would like to say that we welcome the final draft of the Law on Higher Education, which is a product of the work of the Working Group of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. However we now have to send out a plea urging the relevant authorities to adopt this law as soon as possible, as the youth in this country has already waited too long for such a law to be put in place at the State level.

The next issue we discussed in the platform, that is while we were preparing this platform, was the Bologna declaration which has been a burning issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina lately. As the Bologna process is quite extensive, today I will point out only one of its practical implications – the horizontal and vertical mobility of students. Therefore I will give you a personal example concerning the current immobility of students in this country – when I was transferring from the Džemal Bijedić University in Mostar to the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, even though it was the same department, course, subjects and even professors (who teach both in Sarajevo and Mostar), not one of the exams I passed in Mostar was recognized and accepted in Sarajevo. I think that is very degrading and presents a major setback for students in this country. And I am certain that there are a lot of other young people who could tell you this exact same story.

Let me go back to the platform, another issue we discussed was the need to establish an agency that would ensure the quality of the teaching process and curricula, as well as conduct a comparison between the student achievements in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the achievements, that is grades, of students studying at prestigious European universities in order to get a better picture of where our students stand in the entire education process.

And finally I would also like to point out that we have recognized the need to establish a fair and correct policy on admissions to higher education institutions, which would be in accordance with the employment market demand, that is the

demand for workers of certain professions – in order to prevent a situation from occurring in which we would have a large number of experts in one field that cannot find employment, while having no young experts in some other fields.

This was just a brief outline concerning education. At the end of this press conference you will all receive a copy of this Platform where you can read about some other recommendations we have made concerning youth issues. Thank you.

Adnan Bogunić

Good afternoon. I would like to underline three of our top priorities concerning the areas of the Youth Policy Platform relating to social welfare and institutional demands.

Firstly, we feel that it is extremely important that the status of youth houses in Bosnia and Herzegovina is finally solved. Youth houses should clearly be a place where young people should be able to gather, socialize, study and so on – basically they should be a place where the youth can fulfill their social and cultural needs. As you are well aware, the function of the youth houses was significantly altered during the war, as well as after the war. Therefore we insist and plea for the youth houses to be returned to those who need them the most – the youth.

The second priority I would like to present is the following: We feel very strongly that the involvement of young people in institutional structures across all levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina must be ensured in order for the young people to have the opportunity to actively participate in the work of the governmental bodies, to coordinate youth activities and practically participate in the decision making process in order to ensure that their needs and interests are adequately satisfied. It is perfectly clear that any decisions pertaining to education policy should not be made without

consulting the youth, without the youth actively participating in that process.

Thirdly, we welcome the establishment of the Youth Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina and we feel that it should serve as a central body for dealing with and defining youth policy in this country. We fully support the work of the Commission and think that the proposed solutions and demands that we have set out in the Platform could serve as a solid basis for the further work of the Commission. We sincerely hope that our future cooperation with this Commission will be productive, successful and useful. That is all I have to say for now. Thank you.

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Martin Ney

Ladies and gentleman let me just add two points. The Youth Policy Platform is realistic. That is my first point. You have seen that the demands are feasible. All the things listed in the Platform are something that youth in any country should have at its disposal.

My second point is – OHR as the facilitator of this process is very interested that these demands become reality and today's press conference represents only the first step in this endeavor. I will continue to work with these young people in the efforts to also implement the Platform. This is why I would like to use this opportunity to ask all responsible authorities in BiH to consider the Youth Policy Platform very carefully, to look at its content very carefully. These are issues that should see the light of day and be implemented.

And I would also like to invite representatives of NGO's to engage in the process that this Platform will actually be implemented. Finally, before we come to questions I would simply like to congratulate the three who are here on behalf of the whole group. Congratulations!

Questions please. If there are any?

Lejla Redžović, BH TV 1:

First, could you please repeat the names of the young politicians here with you today. Secondly, a question for one of them – what will happen to the Platform now, you have finished it and seem to have some concrete suggestions, so what will you do now?

Srđan Todorović:

We hope and have envisioned some further courses of action. We have developed some practical solutions and would like to see them implemented. However, I would like to emphasize that we hope this presentation will send a clear message to the Government. I hope the development of this Platform is continued in the state institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is really what should happen next. And I hope everyone will take this Platform seriously.

Lejla Redžović, BH TV 1:

If it is not a problem, could you please introduce yourselves again? Another thing, you mentioned that young politicians from 14 different political parties worked on the drafting of this Platform. I would like to know which political parties were exactly involved?

Srđan Todorović:

You will receive a copy of the Platform containing the names of all the parties whose young politicians were involved in the drafting of the Platform. My name is Srđan Todorović. I am from Doboј and I am a member of the Socialist Party.

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Martin Ney:

If I can only add, you will be given copies of the Youth Policy Platform where the parties are named and I take it, also the names are on this...no, the names are not in there, but the parties are mentioned. You will have it in writing.

Nina Malović:

My name is Malović Nina. I do not want to say which political party I belong to because we envisioned this as a youth project, meaning that the point is for us young people to get together and work together, and not to emphasize or promote any political party. Thank you.

Adnan Bogunić:

I am Adnan Bogunić.

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Martin Ney:

I can see that my pronunciation was not clear enough. Do we have more questions?

Journalist #2:

A question for you Mr. Ney. We have heard what the youth thinks about the attitude of the institutions and senior politicians towards young people. How would you describe the attitude that the B&H institutions have towards the youth?

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Martin Ney:

We have the Ministry of Civil Affairs which is responsible for the Youth Commission. The Youth Commission is now in place. We would very much like the commission to take up its work. It is very important that the Ministry of Civil Affairs will also have a department/section/division enabling the Youth Commission, with the accompanying expertise, in its work. I have talked to minister Halilović on this one, so that his Ministry also establishes a professional back up for the Youth Commission.

I think that this is not only an issue for the State level. It is an issue for the Entity level. It is an issue for every single Municipality. And the issues concerning the youth are not simply a matter for one Ministry as we have seen from the

broad spectrum of the issues here. This cuts across a whole range of Ministries.

What is important to understand is that the whole range of issues relates to the young people, but we must pay attention that in the agenda of these institutions we look after the young people. The future of this country is in their hands. What is extremely encouraging here is that they, coming from 14 different political parties, were able to sit down and agree in the drafting process over three months, and agree on issues that the young people should enjoy in this country.

I think this is a marvellous process and my congratulations go out to all of them. And I think the senior politicians who hold responsibility on all levels of government should look very carefully at this process and see that these are realistic issues. These are issues that if we address them, we address the real needs of the young population. And these 14 parties were able to agree among their young politicians. Thank you.

Journalist #3:

I do not understand one thing. You might, but I certainly do not. Please do not get me wrong. I am not criticizing the fact that young politicians have come together, without regards to where they are from and so on, to fight for their rights. However could one of them please tell us, considering the fact that they all come from political parties that are in power or at least participate in the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, exactly what have they done so far as a youth forum, youth movement, within their respective political parties to realise their rights – especially since we have now heard that basically no one in the Government supports them, that is they do not have the support of the Government? This is what I do not understand. Does this mean that they only serve as window-dressing for these political parties in the election year or as something similar?

Who exactly will they address this Platform to since as they mentioned the Chairman of the Council of Ministers did not make the time to meet with them even though they tried to contact him over a period of two months? Who will they send the Platform to? How will the Platform be implemented? Will it ever be implemented or will it all just remain as words on paper?

Srđan Todorović:

Well, unfortunately I think you are right about one thing – young people in some political parties, generally speaking, do not really have any influence or say in any matters within their party. Yet that is a global problem we are fighting and trying to solve in every possible way. We cannot generalize this problem and say that the situation is the same in all political parties. It is perfectly understandable that there are drastic differences. In some political parties the youth represent a strong factor and can significantly influence the work and aims of their political party. That of course also depends on the youth themselves.

It is correct that senior politicians in all political parties establish youth organizations only because the youth problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina are of current interest due to the fact that 70% of the young people want to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina . It is also a fact that all local politicians constantly talk about addressing youth problems. Yet it is a known fact that they take little, if any action and do not really take the youth of this country seriously. It is even possible that they will regard this Platform as simple child's play.

We, the young politicians representing 14 different political parties have come to an agreement and I can definitely say that I will make every effort – as I am sure the others will too – to get my political party to take this Platform, this approach, and youth issues seriously. It is an individual

matter how much any of us will succeed in influencing the politics of our respective parties. But, I think that the fact that we all came together and developed this Platform represents and should reflect on all the senior politicians in this country regardless of which political party they belong to – that this Platform is serious and that we are all in agreement. All of us, no matter which political party we represent, give our full support to every young person regardless of their political affiliation.

What we have succeeded in doing is the following – although not in connection with or as part of this Platform, we requested the Parliament to amend the Election Law and regulate the rights of the youth in the same way that women's rights have been dealt with, as we believe that this would improve the position the youth of this country is in, and would strengthen their influence in political parties they are members of, and therefore the aims of those political parties would increasingly reflect the aims of the youth in this country.

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Martin Ney:

Could I only add one comment? I would plea with you not to interpret this as a window dressing in election year. This process started in July. The serious drafting started in September. It is a process that is long and it started much earlier. It is nothing to do with the elections.

Journalist #4:

Good evening. Concerning the youths request to amend the Election Law, will the OHR help them achieve this, since nothing can be realized without applying certain pressure? That would be all.

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Martin Ney:

As I said at the outset, OHR is the facilitator of the

process. OHR is not the addressee of this Youth Policy Platform and saying we give it OHR and OHR will turn around and simply implement the thing with the various levels of government. We were simply the platform where these people could meet and draft this issue. It is for them, they are the young politicians of this country, to take it up with their individual parties, to take it up with you – to be heard in public, and then with the levels of government and the parliamentary assemblies to implement it. We will remain the facilitator in this process, but we will not simply step in and take over. This is not the function of OHR, especially not after the beginning of the SAA process.

Journalist #4:

I asked if you would help them since these four sets of issues have been talked about for years, yet nothing has ever been done and nothing has changed. Therefore, I do not think that this Platform is anything new or different in comparison to the other youth activities carried out so far. Someone needs to help them.

Adnan Bogunić:

In order to answer your question I think it is best we refer back to what Mr. Ney already said – one of the most important achievements and the significance of this Platform lies in the fact that young people got together in one place, took part in one non-partisan process together and in an extremely professional and meticulous manner with maximum commitment, developed a set of high priority demands that need to be addressed as soon as possible. They also proposed a set of solutions to the problems they identified as the most important problems the youth in this country are facing. And as a start this should be enough. You may rest assured that we will continue to push for the implementation of concrete solutions.

What is also important is that this Platform was conceived as to contain certain solutions that can be implemented immediately. So, it is not necessary to develop those things any further. We have identified the problems and we will together, with the support of youth NGO's, and international organizations insist and apply pressure on the Government to implement these solutions. You can be sure of that.

Journalist #5:

Well, this is not the first time that we have heard what the youth of this country wants, they even came to an agreement before, yet in the end nothing came of it.

Adnan Bogunić:

I am certain that this platform will serve as the foundation for the work of the Commission. The Youth Commission that has been formed at the state level and will, probably due to pressure exerted by us, have to take this platform under consideration. We have already had certain contact on that matter. I am convinced that this platform will serve as a solid basis for the further work of the Commission. I hope you are satisfied with this answer. Thank you.

Srđan Todorović:

May I also answer the question. I will be brief. I completely agree with what my colleague said about the significance of the fact that young representatives from different political parties came together of their own accord, and developed a Platform they all agree on and fully support. I think that is what is most important.

A different matter that concerns the media is – who will help us? I think that you can help us quite a bit. Our words, our public appearances and the influence we have in our respective political parties will be only as powerful as much as you help us to be heard. It is a fact and symptomatic that the media

also do not pay enough attention and give enough media space to the youth and their work. The media mainly report on, give weight to and underline what the senior politicians did, said or think. Therefore, I think you also bear a great deal of responsibility since we will only succeed if you help and support us. Thank you.

Nenad Glušica, NTV 99:

Senior Deputy High Representative, everything that has been said today truly sounds very nice and even a little like a fairytale. However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the common opinion is that the youth of this country will only get its chance when the senior politicians allow them to. Your comment?

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Martin Ney:

I think Bosnia and Herzegovina very often thinks it is a special place on the earth. In fact many things are similar in many countries and making politicians in power listen to the young members in their own parties is a difficult process – that politicians in power listen to young people who are organized in NGOs or that are not even organized in NGOs but simply have very good ideas – this is a common feature.

What is important is that for the first time not NGOs, not just young people, not a school and not a university, but young politicians in this country representing 14 parties have worked across party lines and said here is a way, a very realistic way of how we could address the issues for young people. This is a totally new thing. It happened, to my knowledge, for the first time in this country. Let's give them support, your support. OHR will look after them, but it is for them to take this further with the politicians in power.

Thank you.