Visit of the High Representative to Zagreb

The High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch, held meetings yesterday with Government and Opposition leaders in Zagreb. As a signatory nation to the Dayton Peace Agreement, Croatia has obligations to play a constructive role in its full implementation. This is particularly important for the Croats in BiH as they are the smallest of the constituent nations, therefore the protections afforded by Dayton are vital for them and equally important to the International Community.

The High Representative had hoped to meet President Tudjman, and was sorry to hear he had been taken ill. He hopes his surgery is successful and that the President enjoys a speedy recovery.

Discussions yesterday centred upon the upcoming parliamentary elections in Croatia, scheduled for 22 December. The High Representative recognised the concerns of the International Community in regard to the new election law. In particular, the High Representative raised questions concerning the arrangements for out of country voting and the slow pace of registration for elections. The High Representative explicitly referred to PIC Steering Board Declarations of 17 and 22 September 1999. He reiterated that the voting lists should be centralised and made public, and that voter registration should be speeded up, in particular for the Croatian Serbs living in BiH.

Another focus of discussion was the rebroadcasting of HRT in BiH. The problem is that HRT currently uses a massive proportion of the frequency spectrum with no permission of the appropriate BiH authority. This use of frequencies is preventing the restructuring of the public broadcasting

system, which was especially designed to enfranchise the Croat constituent nation in public TV. In addition, HRT rebroadcasts regularly breech international copyright law. This particularly hurts the BiH Croat media industry. It is believed that a considerable amount of Croatian taxpayers money has been spent on the current system in BiH.

Despite agreement with BiH Croat political and media representatives to allow some continued rebroadcasting of HRT in BiH, the failure by Croatian political representatives now risks the immediate removal of all HRT broadcasts from BiH by the Independent Media Commission. OHR hope, however, that an agreement can still be reached.

The High Representative had constructive discussions with both Government and Opposition leaders and both pledged to keep in close contact on all these issues in the run up to the December elections.