

High Representative Convenes Fifth Consultative Partnership Forum

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, together with the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Dragan Mikerevic, on Friday convened the fifth Consultative Partnership Forum.

A main focus of the meeting was Judicial Reform. The High Representative stressed the core function of the Rule of Law, supported by a professional, independent and reliable judicial system, in Bosnia and Herzegovina's democratisation and Europeanisation process. Efficient and impartial courts protect the rights of citizens; they are also indispensable in rooting out crime and corruption and creating the kind of transparent business environment that will attract the foreign investment that BiH needs in order to prosper.

The Forum participants discussed the reinvigorated Judicial Reform program that was drawn up by the Office of the High Representative and the Independent Judicial Commission (IJC) and endorsed by the Peace Implementation Council's Steering Board in February. The High Representative received the Council of Ministers' full support in establishing the High Judicial Council and their commitment to passing necessary legislation, such as the Criminal Codes, the Criminal and Civil Procedure Codes, and the Law on the Prosecutor's Office. The urgency of the establishment of the BiH Court was discussed and the importance of finding appropriate premises for the Court was amply acknowledged.

Mr Mikerevic assured the High Representative that Judicial Reform and the administrative initiatives and parliamentary legislation that it requires would receive the active support and co-operation of the Council of Ministers.

The participants also considered the question of Civil Service Reform. The High Representative noted that the creation of a professional, merit-based civil service can no longer be postponed. Civil Service Reform is a condition on the EU Road Map, which has yet to be fulfilled. It is also a Council of Europe post-accession requirement. The High Representative voiced his strong disappointment that the Civil Service Law after adoption by the Council of Ministers has been mired in the Parliament's Harmonisation Commission since February.

The High Representative called for the Law to be adopted by 15 May in the form that was agreed between the Council of Ministers and the International Community last year. CoM Chair Mikerevic promised that the Council of Ministers would work vigorously to ensure that the Law is implemented forthwith.

It was agreed that the Council of Ministers would recommend suitable candidates for the Head of the Civil Service Agency to the High Representative.

On the follow-up to the reform of the Entity Constitutions, the High Representative noted that on the state level, changes must now be made to the Election Law so as to provide for indirect elections to the Council of Peoples in the RS, the House of Peoples in the Federation, and the Federation Presidency.

The High Representative asked the Council of Ministers to ensure that its financial obligations vis-à-vis the Election Commission are met. Minister Domazet replied that he is exploring solutions in order to fulfil the CoM's commitment to finance elections. Limitations due to the non-adoption of the budget will not affect the ability of the State to do this.

The High Representative also asked the Council of Ministers to brief him on the current debate in the Council over the PBS Law. He noted that PBS News would be launched on 7 May. At a meeting of the Steering Board, at Political Directors' level

in Sarajevo on 6-7 May, public broadcasting in BiH will be discussed, and members of the Council of Ministers will be able to exchange views on this topic with the Steering Board at this meeting.

The Forum concluded with a discussion of anti-terrorism legislation. The High Representative asked the Council of Ministers to support the adoption of laws and amendments to laws from the 'anti-terrorism' package. The High Representative noted that BiH as a whole will benefit from the passage of proposed amendments to the BiH Citizenship Law, the Law on Special Competencies of the BiH Presidency, the Law on Legal Assistance among the Entities and Brcko, the BiH Law on Immigration and Asylum and the ratification of international counter-terrorism conventions. The High Representative agreed with the proposal of the Council members to explore the possibility of re-calibrating the committee on the fight against anti-terrorism.