

High Representative Meets FRY Minister for Minorities

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, met FRY Minister for Minorities Rasim Ljajic at the OHR in Sarajevo today.

During their one-hour meeting Minister Ljajic briefed the High Representative on efforts by the Yugoslav government to promote refugee return. He said there are around 170,000 BiH refugees still in Yugoslavia, a 40 percent decrease from the figure five years ago. There are around 6,000 refugees from Kosovo currently in BiH.

The minister pointed out that "the return of refugees is important for the reconstruction of trust and confidence in the region."

The High Representative agreed with Minister Ljajic that regional partnership is crucial in the returns process and he noted that meetings such as the recent summit in Sarajevo of the heads of state of Croatia, Yugoslavia and BiH will play an indispensable role in promoting return. "The constructive attitude of the government in Belgrade is extremely useful and important," the High Representative said.

He said that a precipitous decline in international aid would represent a threat to the returns process. "World attention is moving elsewhere," the High Representative noted, adding that because real progress has been made, outside observers sometimes wrongly believe that the returns process has already been completed. Yet, "to have a significant withdrawal of funds from return now would be to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. We are very close to success but we are not there yet."