

High Representative removes Demining Commissioners

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, yesterday removed the three Demining Commissioners Mr. Enes Cengic, Mr. Milos Krstic and Mr. Berislav Pusic from office following investigations into de-mining operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The High Representative had, on the 20th of September, written to the Council of Ministers requesting the Commissioners' removal at their next session on September 25th.

The initial removal request by the High Representative followed extensive investigations into the conduct of de-mining operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which exposed misuse of offices and funds for mine clearing operations donated by the international community. The consequences of such misuse is that Bosnia and Herzegovina is still today a country where mines remain at higher levels than projected and constitute a serious threat to the lives of innocent citizens, in particular children. Although the criminal investigations are continuing, it was therefore necessary for the High Representative to take immediate action to restore the confidence of donors supporting mine clearing operations.

The Decision by the High Representative comes following the failure of the Council of Ministers to discuss, or make a decision on the matter on the 5th of October despite receiving the letters of resignation from the Demining Commissioners. The High Representative has informed the Council of Ministers that the responsibility for mine-action should be immediately transferred to the Ministry of Civil Affairs and Communications on an interim basis. A review by a working group to be set up by the Ministry of Civil Affairs and Communications, and supported by experts from the International Demining Community and OHR, is to establish a more suitable structure to replace

the Demining Commission.