

Mayors from RS and HNC Meet for the First Time

A regional meeting of Mayors from both Eastern Herzegovina (RS) and Herzegovina-Neretva Canton took place today is the first event of its kind. The Mayors from Berkovici, Bileca, Ljubinje, Nevesinje, and Trebinje in the RS and the Mayors of Jablanica and Konjic, as well as the Deputy Mayor of Mostar in the Federation, met to discuss recent return movements in the region under the auspices of UNHCR and OHR with the participation of OSCE.

It is with great disappointment that we have realised that the Mayors of Mostar, Capljina, Stolac and Ravno disassociated themselves from this meeting. They missed an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that they are committed to returns. Their boycott demonstrates that they do not understand the times have changed; they do not seem to care about refugees and DPs; they continue to avoid the responsibility enshrined in Annex 7 of the DPA; they compromise the HDZ BiH leadership's support to the issue of returns

The Mayors of Mostar, Capljina, Stolac and Ravno have sent a signal that they care more about private agendas than the Rule of Law. The process of returns will continue as the people of this country want it – poor leaders like these who boycotted today's meeting cannot prevent this process.

The attendees discussed two-way return movements that have taken place between the Neretva Valley and Eastern Herzegovina (RS), which according to UNHCR figures referring to organized returns amount to 863 Serb families to the HNC and 225 Bosniac families to the RS to this date.

The Mayors also reviewed the response of the international community concerning material support to these movements. The

Mayors took the opportunity to explain their constraints and limitations concerning return, however, it was acknowledged by all that the right to return and the commitments expressed by all the parties in the Dayton Peace Agreement and other international agreements concerning return, freedom of movement, respect and security must be strictly respected and enforced.

The international community highlighted the latest decisions by the High Representative concerning the property legislation and the Mayors committed themselves to provide its quick implementation.

The Mayors welcomed the opportunity to meet face to face and discuss issues of common interest and expressed their willingness to continue to participate in this type of gathering in the future.