

OHR Presents Draft Federation Forest Law

Today, the Office of the High Representative formally presented a draft Law on Forests and Forest Land to the Federation Government.

At present, the forests of the Federation of BiH, one of the country's most important natural resources, are not being properly managed. The public is thus being robbed of a valuable export commodity. Moreover, unregulated forestry practice is seriously damaging the environment, triggering massive erosion, flooding, and landslides, which have even resulted in loss of life.

The new law, drafted at the request of the Federation government, with input from a wide range of both national and international experts, is intended to provide a permanent solution to these problems. It replaces the outdated, socialist-era Forest Law of 1978, and seeks to regulate the Federation forestry industry in line with best western practice, while providing workable mechanisms for the enforcement of such regulation.

The key theme of the law is "sustainable development." It calls for a move away from the exploitative, public sector approach to forest management, and towards sustainable private sector management, which in any case is more appropriate in a modern market-orientated economy. An important aim of the law is to make the Federation timber crop more attractive to Western European buyers.

The law allows for the creation of a Forest Advisory Board, to represent a variety of private and public interests, and of a Federation Forestry Institute, intended to foster a more scientific and modern approach to forestry culture.

It also envisions a radical overhaul of present Federation government structure. Currently, water, forestry and environmental issues are divided between two ministries, and there are significant gaps and overlaps between them. It would make sense to place these closely related issues into a single portfolio under a new Federation Ministry of Natural Resources.

OHR very much hopes that the new draft law will be tabled for adoption by the Federation Government at the earliest opportunity.