

# **Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar**

## **Avis Benes, OHR:**

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the press conference of the international organizations seated in Mostar. My apologies for the heat but I hope that we shall survive. As far as the OHR is concerned, we have three points for you today. The first point refers to the OHR and OSCE letter to Mr. Dziho and Mr. Vrankic with regard to Mr. Merdzo. Mr. Matthias Sonn, the Senior Deputy High Representative, and Mr. Dieter Woltmann, the Acting Head of the OSCE Mission, addressed a letter to Mr. Dziho and Mr. Vrankic with regard to the nomination of Mr. Merdzo to the position of Prime Minister of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton.

You know the whole story regarding Mr. Merdzo. Although he was considered to be a constructive politician and good for co-operation, his candidacy was not accepted. However, Mr. Merdzo's letter of 21 June rescinds as of 1 July the official support for the so-called voluntary three percent net salaries deduction scheme which went into effect on 8 February. Therefore, Mr. Merdzo sent out this letter and it rescinds the support to this scheme, which removes the major impediment to the appointment of Mr. Merdzo as Prime Minister. However, what is very important to stress in this whole story, is that our support, the support from the OHR for the new government will depend on immediate steps to promulgate a unified budget. We therefore expect the new government to immediately establish a new single accounting system for the Canton. This accounting system must not distinguish between beneficiaries on the grounds of nationality. It must reflect the inescapable necessity that all Canton governments work in a unified way.

The OHR and the OSCE are expecting to receive the proposals of the new government composition and to see the new government formed as soon as possible.

Our second point refers to the statements of Mr. Mandic, the Mayor of the Municipality Mostar-Southwest. OHR (S) noted with serious concern some of his recent statements regarding property implementation process. Mayor Mandic stated the evictions were neither signed nor passed by municipal mayors. He also stated that he understands that the Law must be implemented, although "unfortunately," as he says, and he also considers them "the greatest injustice." The public must know that it is indeed an obligation of a Mayor to sign those evictions, and we expect that in case of Mr. Mandic, as well as many of his colleagues, this will be done in a greater extent. We would like to point that the Municipality Southwest, led by Mr. Mandic has one of the lowest percentages of property implementation in the Federation, its rate is even below general RS average. We expect this rate will increase and that Mr. Mandic will do everything to make it. If he does not do that and if he fails to fulfill his obligation as the Mayor of Municipality Southwest, then the population should not tolerate it.

Mr. Mandic should also know that it is also a basic human right of every person to repossess his property. As for the "anomalies" which occur in the process of property return, and Mr Mandic mentioned them as well, these could have been solved if municipal mayors would do their jobs according to the law. According to the law, as all of us here the municipality should organize adequate amount of alternative accommodation for the persons or families who are legally entitled to alternative accommodation. If that was done, evictions would be much less problematic.

I would like to add something in order to avoid misunderstandings and in order to put the things within the right context. The problem with the lack of alternative accommodation and the problem with evictions exist everywhere in the Mostar region, not only in the Municipality Southwest, far from it. You can see the statistics and you will notice that the rate of the implementation of the Property Laws is almost the same in the Municipalities Stari Grad and West. Also, it is well known that in the Municipality Stari Grad there are a lot of problems with evictions. In this sense, this comment on Mr. Mandic alone refers to his very unconstructive statements.

And the third point, which is very brief, on behalf of the OHR. It refers to the misuse of the municipal budget. The OHR is following closely certain developments in municipal councils that point to illegal financing structure being created, as the cases have been noted of misuse of municipal moneys for illegal bodies. OHR warns all councilors involved that infringement of local and Federation tax laws will lead to prosecution.

That is all on behalf of the OHR. Now I give the floor to the OSCE and Bernard Vrbanić.

**Bernard Vrbanić, OSCE:**

Thank you, Avis. Good day to you all from the OSCE. There are two media advisories from the OSCE today.

First of all, the OSCE continues to ensure that property law implementation is better understood by all of the relevant local actors in this process. The latest OSCE endeavor to that end will take place in Trebinje this Friday, the 6<sup>th</sup> of July at the Hotel Leotar. The meeting, entitled "Conference on Co-ordination and Improvement of Property Law Implementation in eastern Herzegovina" will help to identify the main obstacles to implementation of the law in this part of the country, as well as to establish a dialogues between the municipal housing offices, municipalities themselves and the entity government; i.e. Republika Srpska government.

The OSCE expects that conclusions will be reached at this conference which will provide the foundation for better implementation of Property Laws in the future. Some of the more notable invitees include Mladen Ivanic, the Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska, Petar Kunic, the Minister of Local Self-Governance and Mico Micic, the Minister of Refugees and Displaced Persons.

All of the mayors and heads of municipal housing offices in the southeastern Republika Srpska were invited. There will be a media advisory with more information available later in the day. We shall organize transport for media wishing to cover this event, but due to limited space, I would ask that media outlets inform us as soon as is possible about their interest in attending.

Secondly, I would like to announce another ongoing conference in Neum.

22 women from all over the former Yugoslavia, as well as from Albania, Bulgaria and Romania are participating in a week-long "Women Can Do It" workshop, which works in concert with the regional Stability Pact Gender Task Force. This conference is additional training for women that wish to have an impact in politics and public life. Training is provided in networking, identification of common interests and capacity building. I invite all of you to learn more about this conference by attending one of the daily sessions at Neum's Hotel Stela and it lasts until Friday. Thank you.

**Avis Benes, OHR:**

Thanks to Bernard, now let us hear Stefo and UN.

**Stefo Lehmann, UN/IPTF:**

I just have one brief point for you today, very important however. We would hope that you would assist us in getting the word out. Within two weeks will be a deadline for applications to join the police academy in the Federation. It is important to inform the people that the deadline is coming. As I mentioned before, we are looking for women candidates. In this area we are also looking for candidates of Serb ethnicity. You know, a professional police, which is something we all want, requires members that are representative of the BiH population. That is why we still need many women and Serb officers. And women make very good police officers. That is all I have today.

**Avis Benes, OHR:**

Thank you, Stefo. And now, let us turn to SFOR and Captain Ciucci.

**Cpt.Ciucci, SFOR MND SE:**

Good morning from Multinational Division South East. Today we have three topics. As you know from 30<sup>th</sup> of June, MND SE took dispositions to intervene in Zlokuće village located near Vukanovici, about 12 km from Kakanj. The objective is to pump water in order to decrease the pressure that represents a risk of soil sliding. This risk was so critical that houses below the reservoir have been evacuated to prevent possible flooding.

After the Monday meeting between the Mayor of Kakanj, civil representatives of Vukanovici and Zlokuće villages,

civilian geologist, Federation Armed Forces and MND SE engineer officers it was decided that SFOR will assist civilian population in providing 2 trucks with tents and food, 2 trucks with water tank and 12 water pumps.

On the spot that is about 1800 meter long and 500 meter wide, are working German and Italian engineer soldiers as well as some inhabitants of Vukanovici in order to reduce the landslide impact.

The second one is about Vihovici. MND SE undertook a second section of work in Vihovici, in periphery of Mostar. On Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, Mr Golemac, representative of the commune of Mostar-West and Mrs Dzidic, representing MZ, went on the spot of the building site in order to discuss with the military authorities and the person in charge of the building site.

After feasibility study carried out by MND SE, the first building site aimed to level a ground hillock for the construction of the "house" of the MZ. This action led to evacuate 1800 m<sup>3</sup> ground and represented 900 km of displacements by SFOR trucks, was completed on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2001.

These CIMIC achievements, led by the MND SE FR BG, lie within the scope of the rehabilitation of a district of Mostar in order to offer a better quality of life for youth.

On Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 2001, at the hamlet of Spraca, municipality of Blagaj, MND SE delivered to its inhabitants, a water tank entirely renovated, after two weeks of building site.

After feasibility study carried out by the MND SE, work began on 18th June. The work carried out by French soldiers, made it

possible to clean the bottom of the tank, to evacuate 8 m<sup>3</sup> of mud, to run a concrete cover of 5 m<sup>3</sup> to clean the partitions and to carry out a coating on all its walls. The setting in water will then be carried out. This restoration is accompanied by a surface of collecting the water of 200 m<sup>2</sup> cleaned and re-concreted.

This realization lies within the scope of the reinstallation of the inhabitants.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

**Tina Jelin, Studio 88:** You have just said that OHR and OSCE support Josip Merdzo, and the reason for this was his letter annulling the 3% salary deductions. Does this mean that he is withdrawing his support to HNS?

And you said that the OHR and OSCE are expecting the formation of the cantonal Government as soon as possible with the unified budget, but this is contrary to the HDZ which advocates separate budgets. And what are the illegal bodies that you mention?

**Avis Benes, OHR:** As far as the withdrawal of the support is concerned, this would be considered as the withdrawal to support to the illegal and irregular ways of inducing people to finance something, whether it is the self-rule or something else. Concerning the unchanged standpoint of OHR, OSCE and all law-abiding people when it comes to the budget which is contrary to the HDZ standpoint, it is nothing new. However, we find that there is no alternative to the rule of law and there can be no negotiations on this subject. And concerning the misuse of municipal money, it has been noticed that on the agendas of certain municipalities, the items are put on, in which they discuss about the financing of certain structures from the municipal budgets, the structures which definitely are not in accordance with the law. In any case, what is important is that all those municipal councilors are aware of their responsibility, that they can not breach the legal provisions, and if they accept this way of functioning of the municipality, they might be prosecuted.

**Mirsad Behram, RTV Mostar:** I have 2 questions for Avis. What is the attitude of OHR towards last night's statements at the HDZ Central Board, especially when it was recommended to the HNS to take certain steps aimed at protection of the Croat people in BiH, including the Referendum potentially. Jelavic also advocated consistent federalization. And also what is the official title of Mr. Jelavic, since he was removed by the decision of the High Representative and he was chairing the session yesterday as the President of HDZ.

**Avis Benes, OHR:** How to tolerate Mr. Jelavic; we don't know if he has any other titles in some other societies or

groups, but for us it is very simple, he is Mr. Jelavic, private person. As far as HDZ stands are concerned, firstly it is all a matter of speculation. You yourself have talked about potential possibilities, I don't know how much I should go into speculations, But in any case, this whole story of the referendum can only lead into further deception of people, misleading them and giving them false hopes about something which is completely illegal and contrary to the Constitution, if the referendum would be on the topic of the third entity, or some federal unit. To some extent we can agree on the difficult position of the Croat people but HDZ should ask themselves who got them in this position. That's all.

**Spela Cvitkovic Ilicic, HRT:** A question is for SFOR. I am interested to know the following: after the extradition of Milosevic to the Hague, it is spoken in the media that after his first deposition in the Hague what will be unraveled is that there was a secret deal between French SFOR and Milosevic that French SFOR will not do anything on the capture of war criminals in BiH in return for the release of the two then captured French pilots. Can you comment on those allegations?

**SFOR MND SE:** Right now, I cannot give you any answers as I don't know the problems.

**Ilija Sagolj, Habena:** For Mr. Lehmann. Do you have any information that the mujahedins from Bocinja are settling in the Konjic municipality on Jablanica Lake. If that has been done, what was the intention behind it, and to what extent will it affect the political, security and military situation in the canton?

**Stefo Lehmann, UN/IPTF:** We have confirmed the presence of the mujahedins in Bocinja area obviously and I have read media reports that there is a camp near Jablanica. However the IPTF has not confirmed their presence there. So I cannot give you an answer as to how it will affect the political environment. But I am sure that IPTF with SFOR can confirm whether or not there is a presence of mujahedins in that area. But right now I can't.

**Ilija Sagolj, Habena:** I have seen the camp, and can SFOR also answer?

**SFOR MND SE:** No, I can't confirm.

**Zoran Kresic, Vecernji List:** I will ask the gentlemen from SFOR about the allegations that Radisic and Mladic are in the territory of RS. This is also confirmed by the Hague officials. Does the gentleman know if they are in the MND SE AoR?

**SFOR MND SE:** I've seen these allegations in the papers like you, however we have no information that they are in our AoR.

**Faruk Kajtaz, Radio X:** Avis, can you explain a little bit more about these illegal bodies, it seems to be a matter of very serious accusations. What municipal bodies are we talking about, what amounts are we talking about, who are the users of all this? Because if those criminal acts are anti-constitutional, you are not stating the most important facts.

**Avis Benes, OHR:** At this moment, we have decided to give only this kind of warning, however about the details, we will inform you later. You are completely right, this is a very serious and important question and I am sure that we will hear more news on this topic.

**Faruk Kajtaz, Radio X:** It is public prosecutors who usually give warning like this, and they have kept silent.

**Avis Benes, OHR:** Which does not mean that there won't be any.

**Pejo Gasparevic, HINA:** I will be short, my question is for SFOR. Did the MND SE receive anything from Brussels in the past few days, regarding the capture of Karadzic in the case your units run into him?

**SFOR MND SE:** We received nothing about Karadzic and right now we don't know where he is.

**Bernard Vrbanc, OSCE:** Can we just add to that. Ivancic has recently been to the Hague. I think the RS Government especially, especially after the yesterday's events, is hopefully realizing its own responsibilities. BiH is a part of the UN and has responsibilities in this regard, and the RS is a part of BiH, so the responsibilities fall on the RS Government as well.