

Press Announcement by the High Representative, Carl Bildt in Brussels

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BY CARL BILDT, HIGH REPRESENTATIVE

Brussels, 11 March 1996

The existence of free and independent media in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be of crucial importance in the months ahead. Free and fair elections will not be possible if free and fair access to print and broadcast media is denied. Democracy itself will not survive long beyond the elections if political pluralism, freedom of thought and freedom of expression are not properly protected.

In view of the central role of the media, I have convened a Round Table in Brussels on Tuesday 12 March involving some of the main governments, international organisations and non-governmental organisations with a strong interest in these questions. I have concentrated on those with a strong presence on the ground in Bosnia, but I hope to develop this group into an open forum in which all organisations with a serious interest in Bosnia's media scene will be able to play a role. The Office of the High Representative does not aim to play a direct role itself as an editorial or broadcasting organisation, but I see a serious job to be done in co-ordinating the efforts of the international community and offering political assistance where this is required, whether to the Bosnian media or to external media organisations.

There are some encouraging signs within Bosnia of the language of war giving way to the language of peace. But a great deal of work remains to be done. The indications elsewhere in the region are not all good, and I was disturbed by recent developments in Yugoslavia, both by the changes at NTV Studio B and by the clampdown on the activities of the Soros Foundation.

My Senior Adviser, Pauline Neville-Jones, will chair the conference and I shall follow its conclusions with interest. We shall expect to follow up with regular meetings in Sarajevo if this is the wish of the participants.