

Transcript of Opening Statement by the High Representative at the press briefing following the meeting of the PIC Steering Board

Mr. Carlos Westendorp

Westendorp: We have been six and a half hours with the Steering Board. I wanted the Steering Board to meet here in Sarajevo because it would have much more impact, I believe, here – on the one hand in the local press as a proof that we, the international community, are maintaining their interest in the peace process and in implementation, and at the same time because it is good that the members of the international community come here and see for themselves the situation.

In the first place, we have made an assessment about the general situation in the peace implementation process. The Steering Board has reaffirmed the Sintra conclusions, but we have noted, all of us in general, that the level of compliance with the Peace Agreement is still inadequate and that the deadlines set up in Sintra are not really met. So the steering board has supported the OHR in its efforts to implement and to speed up this implementation. It is clear that those who do not comply with Dayton will have to suffer the consequences of their actions. We have stressed very hard that economic conditionality would be fully applied through the economic task force over which I preside, and in which there are representatives of different international organisations. Those entities who comply, they will receive international support. Those who do not, they won't receive support.

This is important in view of the Donor Conference. I also wanted the Donor Conference to take place as soon as possible in order that the international community shows that they are still interested in helping the economic reconstruction process in this country, which is very important. And, although the conditions set up in Sintra are not met, we are very near to meeting the conditions. But there is still one issue, as you know, the single currency. I hope that this issue will be solved, but in any case at the Donor Conference, it would be very clearly established that all entities, all the authorities in these entities who are complying with Dayton, will receive the support of the international community. Of course, that includes not only the federation, but also Republika Srpska. It will apply if there is any authority in any of the two entities who do not comply with Dayton and who do not co-operate with the international community. It is, of course, their responsibility to explain to the population that the population cannot receive the support of the international community because they are not complying with Dayton, they are not co-operating with the international community.

The other issue has been the situation in the Republika Srpska. We have great concern about the situation. There is an increasingly anti-democratic climate. There are acts of terrorism and abuse of police authority, which are undermining basic human rights, they are obstructing the implementation of the Peace Agreement, and they are threatening wider security. We firmly condemn all acts of terrorism and violence in the Republika Srpska which are clearly designed to intimidate the international community and its implementation of the Peace Agreement. And the international community will clearly hold those in power and in positions of responsibility fully responsible for any such act.

We are clearly worried about the stagnation of the peace process in both entities. It's clear, not only in one entity but in particular, at present, in the present crisis situation, in Republika Srpska. The failure of the Republika Srpska representatives to attend the meetings of the common institutions is a very clear breach of the Peace Agreement because they are elected to come here into the common institutions and to comply with Dayton. So we have to tell the authorities or representatives of the Republika Srpska that they have to comply urgently with Dayton.

The Steering Board also deplored campaigns against the international community, not only throughout the acts of terrorism, but also including recent incidents of media manipulation, and, of course, the display of posters of Radovan Karadzic in contravention of the commitments accepted, even accepted by the Republika Srpska government, in July '96.

In any case we have assessed the situation and we expressed our interest and wishes that the political differences within the Republika Srpska be solved peacefully and through a dialogue in a manner consistent with the rule of law and the democratic principles of the Peace Agreement. The international community will support those actions

which are in accordance with the Peace Agreement. And as far as the OHR is concerned, you know very well our position and you know also very well the position of the principals here that the international community supports the provisional conclusions of the Venice Commission which you know says that the dissolution of the assembly in the Republika Srpska is a constitutional act.

One thing which is important is that I have asked all the members of the international community that all further contacts, either bilateral or collective, with authorities of the Republika Srpska have to be in accordance with the respective mandates, democratic mandates and competences of those authorities as it is in the constitution of the Republika Srpska and BiH. That is, to contact them respectively as presidency of the Republika Srpska, the representative of the BiH presidency on the territory of the Republika Srpska, and the caretaker government of the Republika Srpska. And this has to be very clear and the internationals here have taken good note of my demand, at my request, which is good, otherwise there is going to be a lot of confusion.

There are two issues which are very important – the media situation and the special police situation – police activities in general, their intimidating activities. I think that these two issues, the control and the manipulation of the media by the Republika Srpska authorities, and the intimidation activities by the Republika Srpska police, are obstacles, big obstacles to impartial presentation of the current political crisis in the Republika Srpska, because we really think that what is essential in the Republika Srpska is stability, which is the pre-requisite for democratic and fair elections.

So we have discussed very deeply and thoroughly how, when, and whether the High Representative is going to take actions if the public media do not comply with the Dayton agreement as far as free expression and free and fair access to media is concerned. This has been a matter of concern and we are seriously considering, if there is no compliance with it, to take action.

The Steering Board has also stressed that it would not tolerate any recourse to force or violence, or the unauthorised deployment of military or para-military forces. We have demanded that the police in the Republika Srpska halt acts of intimidation and comply fully with all provisions of the Peace Agreement. We know that the reorganisation of police is also something which is not in progress at all in the Republika Srpska.

Finally, we believe that there is no lasting peace without justice. The steering board called upon the political leaders in the region to co-operate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and fulfil their obligation to deliver those indicted for war crimes for trial at the International Tribunal.

We have also dealt with other important issues such as for instance the refugee issue. There are several possible actions and one is that incentives be given to the municipalities who practice the open cities policy. At the same time it is absolutely necessary to amend immediately the property laws in both entities which are preventing the returns in a proper way.

We had also a long assessment of the situation in Brcko. The situation in Brcko has to be improved because both entities are making a lot of difficulties for the supervisor to carry out his mandate. I shall sum up these difficulties in two directions – one is the refusal by the Federation to accept the identity cards issued by the local authorities of the Republika Srpska on one hand, and the lack of security and the misbehaviour of the Republika Srpska police vis-à-vis the people who want to return. We have stated very clearly that those who are not complying with these requirements will have a negative impact on the decision of the arbitrator about Brcko. The behaviour of the parties in co-operation with the supervisor is going to have an influence with the arbitrator.

We have also spoken about Mostar which is also an important issue. There is the very same non-compliance in several aspects, mainly due to the presence and influence of Croat extremists in Mostar. Although there is a certain positive evolution in the last weeks, especially after the arrest of some criminals who participated or inspired the criminal events last February. The influence of the Croatian authorities has to be used and we have agreed on asking the Croat authorities to extend their influence on the extremists in the west Mostar and in general.

Finally, we have also discussed the municipal elections. The process is controlled as you know by the OSCE. There have been some problems which have been solved. Also the monitoring is going well and we really believe that with the co-operation of the parties and with some extra funding that we are asking from the international community to help – With good implementation, we are confident that these elections in September would be of a higher standard than the elections which took place last year. They will be freer, and fairer but of course, everything is relative in this life – especially in this country.

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