

Transcript of the Press Conference

Welcome. My Name is Carl Bildt. I am the High Representative. Assistant Secretary Kornblum, you probably know as well. The person you might not yet know is Ambassador Robert W. Farrand from the United States whom I have today, with the support I can say of the Steering Board, appointed as Deputy and Supervisor for the Brcko area. The background for the meeting today I think is familiar too, the arbitration award for the Brcko area that was issued on February 14th. We announced at that time that we were going to hold a conference to discuss the different implementation issues. We accepted the kind invitation of the government of Austria to hold it here in Vienna and that we have done today. A paper has been distributed to you which is the Chairman's conclusion, i.e. my conclusions but in reality the conclusions of the countries of the Steering Board with whom we had a prior discussion – and we also listened to the views of the parties. That in no way takes away from or adds to anything that was there in the arbitration award, but it really mobilizes the resources and sets up implementation structures to help with the implementation of the different things that need to be done in the Brcko area during the supervision period covering roughly the coming year. I am not going through all of this because it is, as you can see, quite a lot.

We will try to outline a programme that is realistic. We think that what is in this document is achievable. In spite of all the difficulties that we are facing in different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina we believe this is achievable during the course of this year.

The critical issues would include the subject of the police monitoring operation, critical to us in achieving or securing freedom of movement and in facilitating the possibility of refugees and displaced persons returning. that means a solid and robust international police presence. And what I will be doing tomorrow is to write to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and immediately request that the Security Council increase the number of IPTF monitors by 200 in order to help with the implementation tasks in the Brcko area. That will go hand in hand with the reduction of the existing police forces that is RS in the area.

Today I might add that there are roughly 30 IPTF persons in the Brcko area, so the total force of let's say in the order of 230 is another way of saying that the density of international police monitors in Bosnia-Herzegovina will be nearly ten times the density that we have in the other parts of BiH. And I am also very satisfied with the fact that the countries of the Steering Board alone have today committed more than half that number. And I know that there are further commitments coming from also, and not least, different European countries. That makes me optimistic that we shall achieve that target, that we will get the decision by the Security Council and I would hope that the increased force will be on the ground as soon as possible. Critical is also that we can contribute to the economic revitalization of the area and there are indicated here a number of projects: the East / West road connections in the area, the different North / South connections, the road and the rail. But also what needs to be done and that is also going to be the most resource consuming is to facilitate the return of refugees.

It is a heavily devastated area. There is a need for large amounts of money to rebuild the houses that have been destroyed in order to make it possible for the people to come back and also to take care of those, Serbs in this particular case, who are nowadays sometimes in these buildings. Those needs for housing will also be taken into account. And the representatives of the European Commission and the World Bank have presented their assessment of the needs and the resources that will be available.

We have also decided that – it is not in the Chairman's conclusions, but it is a decision anyhow – that we shall devote a special part of the Donor's Conference coming up in the next few months to the special needs that we see in the Brcko area.

I am not going to go further into this, perhaps ask John Kornblum to say something, but it's been a good meeting in spite of the fact that, of course, there are parties here that have very different points of view, a constructive atmosphere, and I hope a good start for the Supervisor and for the implementation period.

John Kornblum: Thank you Mr. Bildt. I won't go into the details as Carl Bildt has done. You will see the document.

It has a number of very important arrangements. I think what I might contribute to this discussion is to specify once again a bit more what we are about here. This was not a conference to agree anything about what's going on in Brcko. This was a conference to establish implementation structures. And, as Mr. Bildt said, I think a very good start was made with the fact that the Steering Board countries, the several international organisations, the parties represented at the level of foreign ministers and above in the case of the Entities, inviting presidents and the vice-presidents, demonstrated that the concept that Mr. Owen had put forward when he announced his arbitration award, is in fact one which can contribute to peace. He said as well that there are no winners nor losers in this decision. The only winner is the Peace Process. And you can see with a strong commitment of presence of people, of resources included by the American Government in this process that we are working very hard and have a good chance to achieve what Mr. Bildt said, to take the tragic situation in Brcko and transform it from a flashpoint, a point which only a few short weeks ago could be a cause of the renewal of war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We are now transforming it to a point of enhanced co-operation. Mr. Bildt said that there are many differences and these differences are not gonna be overcome in one week or one month or even half a year. But what we have now in place is a structure and readiness which was also, I think, expressed very clearly by the parties who were there today to take the challenge which has been put to them in a way by Mr. Owen and take the offer of assistance by international community and the supervisor and the resources, in the very strong economic reconstruction programme. And the fact that the jurisdiction over Brcko has in fact not been decided, in other words, this is the question of co-operation to see what in fact can be done, to see that a multi-ethnic system can be brought there as soon as possible to make Brcko become a model of co-operation for the rest of Bosnia. And I think that this is a very hopeful sign and I think that this conference was quite successful today. It really demonstrated a commitment of all the parties to add to the success to this project, and now the job is to get down to work and this is what we all intend to do.

Question: What will the police monitors be able to achieve?

Carl Bildt: Quite a lot will be achieved. I said very many times before that the police question is one of the greatest problems in all of Bosnia-Herzegovina. There are also the human rights violations that we have seen, harassment of the ethnic minorities and things like that. And this is really happening all over, roughly half of it done by police and another half is tolerated by local police. The local police is a problem that we are devoting quite a lot of attention too. Our experience is also that when we have an IPTF man or woman there they behave. So the monitoring does have a profound effect. It is where there is no monitoring that we see the nasty things happening and what we are aiming at here and we don't have it anywhere else in Bosnia is a one to one situation – one local on one international. And that means that we can achieve monitoring of 100%. Then you go there a couple months from now detect one case of that not being the case. That might well happen. You see when we have an equal number of locals and internationals and we have this density of monitoring then we can be quite confident of achieving quite a lot in this respect. That's based on the experience that we have all over the country and that's based on the experience that we have in this particular area of Brcko. It is significant, the effect of this, there is no doubt about it. We have very few cases during the past year of the local police doing nasty things when the IPTF is present but we have quite a lot of examples of local police doing nasty things when IPTF is not present. Monitoring is effective, as the watchful eye of the international community.

Question: What about refugees and displaced persons?

Carl Bildt: We attached particular importance to the orderly and phased return both of the refugees and the displaced persons. We will establish, or the supervisor of the OHR will establish, the procedure and the programme on how this should be done. We have procedures, you might be aware of, for return to the ZOS. That has been patchy so far. I mean it has achieved both the fact that we avoided major conflict and the fact is that there have been some returns. We do not intend to do that in an identical way because there's another fact that needs to be taken account of. Those that have been living there should also have the right to go back. Then those that are there today can also stay but not necessarily in the same place. And then we have a very large amount of destruction that we need to tackle there, we need to do demining, we have to take care of unexploded ordinances, this was a very, very, damaged area. And it was left a lot of the debris of war that needs to be taken care of. But the programme and procedures will work in a phased way so that refugees and displaced persons can come back. And that's going to be I think the most important of the tasks during the supervision period. Well I would say that is one and the elections to start the multi-ethnic local administration is another.

Question: How quickly can it happen?

Carl Bildt: It will take some time. It will have to be phased not least in light of what I said concerning demining and unexploded ordnance. I don't know when exactly that will be.

Question: Do you think Serbs should be allowed to return where they came from around Brcko?

Carl Bildt: Yes, of course we do. We have, if it took in the wider area, there were two Serb inhabited villages, completely Serb, that are now in Federation Brcko, and I would hope that we will be able to create conditions for them if there is a wish to return to those. A lot of them are today in Brcko town. Then there are in Brcko town, there are Serbs coming from Jajce, Drvar, Sarajevo, a number of areas and we are working actively on refugee return and return of displaced persons all over the country. I would be lying to you if I said that we've had major success. It's a slow process, but I would sincerely hope that what we are now doing can be intensified in Brcko and serve as a model of what we can achieve in other parts of the country: Jajce, Sarajevo, Drvar, others can be mentioned as well. And I also say that, of course, a lot of these people in Brcko are displaced from other areas of the country in conflict. We will respect their needs as well and the same is the case for the rules and regulations of the elections.

Question: Are the Bosnians happy with the outcome here?

Carl Bildt: I am not going to speak for either side. They can speak for themselves, but, of course, they want either more or less. We are not here to say that there are any winners or losers, I mean, this is a process, where the parties are going to try to get as much, from their point of view out of it, as possible. We did not ask for any specific directions, but I think that in broad terms the parties agreed that we should go along this path. They have their different priorities, they emphasise somewhat different aspects of it. That's fair enough if they want to accelerate some of this on one side, and decelerate, on the other side. This is a process, and so far, I would say that the process is going far better than I think, anyone could have anticipated, say, six months ago.

Question: What provisions are there for us as free media to be in Brcko? And who was on the arbitral tribunal ?

Carl Bildt: I don't think that media freedom is a major problem. When I was there last time, the place was crowded with media from all countries, so I am not aware of any specific problem there. The second is the Arbitration Tribunal. Yes, that is composed of the presiding officer who is the US lawyer Mr. Roberts Owen, and then there is Mr. Popovic from the Republika Srpska, and Mr. Sadikovic from the Federation. Those three are the ones that compose the Arbitration Tribunal. They have the right to return to the issue at the latest 15 March next year. Then the Arbitration Tribunal can go back on the issue and say that now we decide to change everything, one way or the other. And that is a strong weapon that is available in this process, and that has not been available in any other part of the Peace Implementation Process in Bosnia. One often hears comparisons with say Mostar, with the difficulties that are there. Why should the possibilities be greater in Brcko than in Mostar? I think the answer is in this particular aspect different. The Arbitration Tribunal can come back and read this entire issue before 15 March next year, and that is a very strong weapon.

Question: Why were the people of Brcko not represented at this conference?

Carl Bildt: I think they were all represented because what we had here were the three mayors of the different parts of Brcko. We had here the Mayor of the Republika Srpska part of it, we had the Bosniak Mayor and we had the Croat Mayor. So there were three, as a matter of fact, elected representatives of the people in Brcko were here, because they were all elected in different capacities in the 1991 elections.

Question: But what about the refugees?

Carl Bildt: The refugees were those that lived there in 1991. And they elected these leaders. And these leaders were here in Vienna today, the democratically elected representatives of the Bosniaks, of the Croats, and of the Serbs.

Question: When will the elections be?

Carl Bildt: We will have further consultations on that between the Office of the High Representative and the Supervisor and the OSCE mission. What we have said in the statement here is that we would like to have them as soon as possible and that we would like to use the OSCE Rules and Regulations for the elections, but we'll have further consultations on that particular issue. Thanks very much.