Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR		• Cantonal Education Ministers must stop administration duplication
OSCE	Richard Medic	• No statement
SFOR	Capt. Magistretti	• No statement

Sandra Niksic – OHR

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen and welcome to the press conference of international organizations seated in Mostar. Today, a special greeting on behalf of the OHR in Mostar as I would like to give the floor to Ambassador Jean Pierre Bercot, DHR and Head of the OHR South who will address you with a few farewell words. I would like to ask you to bear in mind that due to previously scheduled obligations the Ambassador will not be able to take your questions. Thank you.

Ambassador Bercot – OHR:

Good morning to all of you. Thank you for your coming.

Ladies and Gentlemen, twenty months ago I had the honour and privilege of taking the position of the Deputy High Representative in Herzegovina region. The time that I spent here has been for me a great challenge and one of the most special and fascinating periods of my life. Today, the time has come to say goodbye. This is a simultaneously unhappy and happy occasion for me. I am sad to leave Mostar because over these months that I spent here I have grown close to this City and the region of Herzegovina, as well as to its people. I am happy because there is a new challenge ahead of me – I have been assigned to take the post of the Ambassador of France in one West African country. During my work in Mostar I have spent all of my energy on trying to bring all three constituent peoples of my area of responsibility close to each other, to mediate in order to find consensus, to motivate them to work together for the benefit of the whole population. This was not always a successful task. This part of the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina has enormous potential – not only economic – but also it is the home to talented, courageous and determined people. The only regret that I have is that so often we had to face the mental barriers and fears that are still present in the minds of people. Instead of trying to work together some people insist on emphasising the differences and insist on separation. When I was talking to the people of Herzegovina, so many times I have heard that the citizens want to live in this country and to make every effort to prevent the young generation from leaving it to look for better future abroad. Unfortunately, these voices are not being taken into consideration by many of the politicians, who exploit the memory of those who were killed during this tragic conflict build partitions and walls. This is not the way to build a democratic country with ensured rights and freedoms for everybody. I strongly believe that in this region, as well as in the whole country, all people can live and work together drawing from the excellent example of pre-war Mostar – the city where people of various nationalities were living side by side, mixing with one another through friendship and marriage, who preferred to build rather than destroy, the thriving and prosperous city admired and highly esteemed by the people of this region. So let me wish you every good fortune for the future.

Thank you very much Ladies and Gentlemen.

Q: Can I pose one question?

Ambassador Bercot – OHR

If you ask one question the others will also ask questions and I cannot make a preference.

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Richard Medic – OSCE:

Good morning ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the second part of today's press conference. Neither OSCE nor SFOR have a statement for today but we are here to answer your questions. We do have a statement from the OHR and it will be read out to you.

OHR

Ministers of Education of Canton 6 and Canton 7 must act in accordance with commitments they made to the Peace Implementation Council on 12 June and issue instructions which will put an end to the administrative duplication in HNC schools. Opposition to these administrative reforms is detrimental to the interest of children who attend these schools. These reforms will reduce the amount of money that is being spent on administration, which will lead to desperately needed funds for children and teachers. The existing school system in BiH is not in line with European standards and therefore these reforms are needed if BIH wants to continue its way towards Europe, with all benefits for citizens of this country that this process brings. The OHR South hopes that the HNC Ministry of Education will not miss the opportunity to issue these significant instructions in due time.

Richard Medic – OSCE:

Thank you OHR. I now leave the floor open to your questions.

Questions:

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88/Radio Free Europe): At yesterday's meeting of the HDZ BiH leadership in Vitez, education reform, among other things, was discussed. With regard to that, Mr. Coric confirmed that they discussed the 'two schools under one roof' project, which should be implemented by the beginning of this school year in this Canton and in the [Mostar] Gymnasium case. Could you explain this and what does it actually mean – is it a physical integration? Will it happen by the beginning of this school year? Will administrative unification happen? Can we expect physical integration during this school year?

A: Richard Medic: Thanks for your question. I just want to emphasise that we should keep these two issues separate, although they are obviously part of one overarching goal: education reform. Firstly, regarding the administrative unification of 'two schools under one roof' in this Canton and Canton 6, OSCE has emphasised numerous times that, in order for implementation of the administrative unification of 'two schools under one roof' to take place by the start of this school year, urgent action must be taken. OSCE welcomes the fact that at yesterday's meeting, the Prime Minister of this Canton said that he would push forward the implementation of administrative unification and ensure that instructions are issued as soon as possible. I think for further information you should really contact the Cantonal Ministry of Education.

The second issue you touched on is the Gymnasium in Mostar. I'll tell you where we currently stand. At the moment, administrative unification by the 1st of September, in time for the start of the new school year, is moving forward and will take place. I understand that local authorities are this week working very hard to ensure that instructions are issued on time.

As far as the physical unification of the two Gymnasia in Mostar, 'Mostar First' and 'Fra Dominik Mandic', that is a separate issue. From the beginning, when the international community presented the integration plan, one of the conditions for the refurbishment of the Old Gymnasium premises was the implementation of the integration plan. We have obviously seen a lot of obstruction and shuttling of responsibility from the various authorities on this issue. As a result, the IC has not been able to secure those funds, given that the integration plan is yet to be implemented. At the moment we have a situation where the Old Gymnasium still has only five usable classrooms. Refurbishment of other rooms to ensure that there are enough classrooms for the 600 students from the 'First Mostar' Gymnasium and 'Fra Dominik Mandic' Gymnasia can therefore not take place by September. So in answer to your question – as it stands at the moment, the building won't be in a state to accommodate students from both gymnasia by the start of the school year.

Q: Faruk Vele (Dnevni Avaz): I would like to hear your comment on the new request of 'Fra Dominik Mandic' teachers, i.e. unification of this Gymnasium with 'Fra Grga Martic' and then with the 'First Gymnasium' in order to, allegedly, equalise the ratio between Bosniak and Croat students?

A: Richard Medic: Firstly, OSCE believes that this proposal does deserve careful consideration. OSCE have not received, as far as I know, a formal proposal in writing. But remember that we are talking about integrating two

Gymnasia which are, at the moment, segregated. We have the 'Fra Dominik Mandic' Gymnasium, which is very poorly equipped. They do not have sporting facilities, they only have five classrooms, and the heating is poor. On the other hand we have the 'Mostar First' Gymnasium, which is using a primary school premises, also with poorly equipped classrooms. They are cramped into these classrooms in single shifts. My understanding is that the 'Fra Grga Martic' Gymnasium does not have the same problems.

The integration plan for unifying the two Gymnasia we are talking about is also a symbolic step. Students should have adequate facilities and resources to study in an integrated Gymnasium, and this symbolic step should demonstrate that the education system in BIH can be de-segregated. The integration plan for the two gymnasia is an initial step forward in the process of de-segregation and modernisation of the education system, particularly in Mostar. And this is a process which the education ministers at entity and cantonal levels committed themselves to last year when they adopted the Strategy Paper for Education Reform. In that Paper, the ministers pledged to ensure that all children would be able to study in 'integrated, multicultural schools'. I hope that answers your question.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88/Radio Free Europe): If I got it well, the OSCE Plan on the 2 Grammar Schools integration failed over obstruction. There is supposed to be 1 School Board, 1 Headmaster, 1 budget. It seems the schools will remain physically divided; the idea to have 5 subjects from the field of natural sciences together, which was one of the main conditions for the physical reconstruction of the building, is not going to happen. We are now witnessing a vicious circle: no funds for the building reconstruction to accommodate pupils, and, on the other hand, no integration that is to be followed by the reconstruction. Can you tell us who obstructs the process?

A: Richard Medic: The process is moving forward. As a first step we are awaiting administrative unification, where there would be one school director, one school board, and one budget. So the process is moving forward but it has been all too slow. However, as I said before we welcome the fact that the Cantonal Education Ministry and Prime Minister have accepted that the administrative unification of 'two schools under one roof' and the Mostar gymnasia must take place. Rather than commenting further I again suggest you direct your questions to the cantonal authorities.

Q: Meri Musa (FTV): If the instructions are not issued by this coming Friday, do you plan to impose sanctions together with the OHR?

A: Richard Medic: I think that anything that could happen *after* Friday should happen *by* Friday.