

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

Avis Benes - OHR:

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the press conference of the international organisations seated in Mostar.

Today we are going to remind of the date, which I would like to congratulate to all of you on behalf of the OHR. The citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina have waited a long time for their country's formal entry into the European integration process. Now this day has come. The High Representative welcomes this crucial step. The last one-and-a-half-year's have brought Bosnia and Herzegovina decisively forward, starting with the drafting and passing of the Election Law, and leading all the way to the implementation of the Constitutional Court's decision. The Council of Europe will provide the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina with new mechanisms to protect their human rights. Membership also brings with it new obligations to reform the country further and bring its legislation into line with European standards. Taking into consideration that there will be a number of requests for harmonization with the European laws and with various criteria after the BiH's accession to the CoE, the activities of all bodies of authority should go into this direction.

Henning Phillip - OSCE

Good morning everybody. The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina congratulates the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the significant step towards European integration taken today when the country became the 44th member of Council of Europe. Membership of the Council of Europe will benefit the people of BiH in the protection of their rights and interests and is a clear sign of the will of BiH authorities to move forwards and towards Europe. The OSCE Mission has worked with the authorities to meet the requirements for CoE membership and has strongly supported BiH's accession. Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership is a recognition of the considerable progress achieved in developing democracy, human rights and the rule of law towards Council of Europe standards. Recent amendments to the Constitutions of the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska were an important step in that direction. Elections this fall, the first ones held by BiH authorities, will be a further test of the will to successfully develop the country on the basis of tolerance and common understanding. The recent Constitutional changes addressed the ethnic issues, now it is vital for the people of BiH that upcoming elections concentrate on real issues, such as the economy, where ethnicity does not play a role. There is all reason for Bosnia and Herzegovina to celebrate reaching this important goal on the road towards Europe but there is no reason to rest. Bosnia and Herzegovina has not fulfilled all the conditions for membership to the Council of Europe and now a number of difficult post-accession commitments needs to be completed within defined time limits. This requires a strong political will, at all levels of government and among all political parties, to define joint interests rather than perceived divisions. The OSCE Mission will monitor and analyse the implementation of the forthcoming objectives in close co-operation with the Council of Europe and other international agencies. It is ready to provide its expertise and will continue to advise and support the authorities and citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Related press release will be distributed later today.

Turning to the local environment - Director of OSCE's Regional Centre Mostar, Ambassador Thomas Timberman, visited Mostar Municipality North yesterday. He, Mayor Music and senior administration members toured and met with the directors of three recently constructed medium size companies. The municipality attracted them, and others, by offering a package of inducements including expedited licensing and other services, delayed payments on property purchases and quality support. Ambassador Timberman was impressed by the modern, focused, problem-solving attitude of the municipality's government, particularly on their effective job creation strategies. Mostar North has established excellent conditions for investment and by so doing, has created 400 new jobs. Timberman commended the local politicians saying - what this municipality has accomplished in recent years can serve as a model for the whole of BiH. He continued - this obvious success is a direct result of an active and dynamic policy of a young progressive administration which makes dealing with citizens' concerns its number one job. Timberman also complimented the mayor for another effective innovation when he established a holistic process which confronted head-on returnee related violence which is successfully lowering tensions and reducing incidents.

And the final item turning to the art – Trans-European Express is the title of an exhibition featuring works of young Mostarian artists. The OSCE Regional Centre Mostar facilitates the exhibition, which is taking place in the premises of the Regional Centre, Liska 8. The exhibition will be officially opened by the Director of OSCE's Regional Centre Mostar, Ambassador Thomas Timberman, on Saturday, April 27, at 19:00 hrs. On the occasion of the exhibition opening Ambassador Timberman will also present to the public an art book containing all 200 contributions to OSCE last year's youth contest "My world, my BiH". All media are cordially invited to attend this event.

Thank you very much.

Kirsten Haupt - UN:

Before I come to my statement I would like to join my colleagues in congratulating the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the admission of their country into the Council of Europe, which, as my colleagues have already pointed out several times, represents a very important step towards European integration.

Coming to my statement today I have two items for you. On Monday, 22nd of April, UNMIBH issued two letters of de-certification to the two former police forces, Almir Nuhic and Ante Kresic. Almir Nuhic has been working as a police officer in Konjic. Having reviewed his war time background UNMIBH found that Nuhic when required to disclose his war time activities had omitted the information that he had been involved in the activities in the Celebici detention camp in 1992. The second letter of de-certification was delivered to the former Stolac police officer Ante Kresic, who has been indicted by the Mostar Cantonal Court for war crimes committed in Stolac in 1993 and is currently awaiting his trial. In the meantime both Nuhic and Kresic were dismissed by the Ministry of Interior.

Second item today the SRSG Jacques Paul Klein is going to pay a visit to Herzegovina-Neretva Canton on Friday 26th of April to officially inaugurate State Border Service Field Office in Capljina. During this visit Mr. Klein will also meet with the returnees in the Capljina area and he will visit the village of Pocitelj. An itinerary for his visit with indications of media opportunities for you will be made available tomorrow.

Thank you.

Questions

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): A question for the UN. Could you confirm information that a criminal procedure will be launched against Dragan Mandic, former Minister of Interior of Canton 7?

A: Kirsten Haupt: I would have to check. I cannot confirm for the moment.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): I have a question for Ms. Haupt. There is an ongoing procedure against three Bosniak officers for smuggling of arms to Kosovo. According to the media reports, this region was one important route for smuggling. Does international police have any information about this?

A: Kirsten Haupt: You have difficult questions for me today. Again I have to say that I do not have any details on that. Maybe, we can talk about it afterwards and I will find out for you. It would be the best.