

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

Avis Benes - OHR:

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

Today on behalf of the OHR the first issue will be a reminder of the important deadline that expires tomorrow. We do not have a statement right now but if you want you can get it later on from our office.

Namely, as it is known but it is not amiss to remind of it – tomorrow is the final important deadline for the adoption of the amendments to the Entity's Constitutions, amendments that will have to fully and with no changes incorporate Mrakovica -Sarajevo Agreement from the 27th of March about the implementation of the decision of the BiH Constitutional Court on the constituency of the nations. The OHR has requested from the Parliaments to complete this task at latest until tomorrow so that the Election Commission has enough time to announce organization of elections in October as it had been previously agreed. The OHR expects from the Entities to act in a reasonable and responsible manner and adopt the amendments to the Constitutions because it is the only way towards fully functioning BiH, which has its place in Europe. The amendments ensure multi-ethnicity in both Entities as well as the representation of all three nations in executive, legislative and judicial authority. Those who refuse to recognize this are obviously the parties that do not want to see BiH as a part of Europe and who do not want to be a partner of the International Community. Those are the parties that can survive only by keeping the people in a constant paranoia in which the members of their nations are the main victims. Those are the parties that have no strength for vision and to assume responsibility for decisions that can improve the position of the people that they allegedly represent. Those are the parties who like this existing unjust situation because it constantly gives them grounds for keeping the people in fear. In the Federation those parties at this moment are HDZ and SDA. Speaking about the agreement, one thing has to be clear to everybody and I think it is clear and that is the agreement is not a perfect one. No party and the IC either are 100% satisfied with it. However, it is a consequence of the political compromise and agreement reached among the parties in BiH, it is the most realistic possible at this moment and it is a good base for positive changes that will happen as its consequence. When one speaks about non-acceptance of this agreement it is really hypocritical of, for instance, HDZ to say that there is no compromise when it comes to equality of the Croat nation when up to recently it was just that party that was against the constituency of the Croat nation in the Republika Srpska and which in many aspects has simply given up the destiny of the Croat nation in the Republika Srpska. What kind of protection of the Croat interest it is through the acceptance of the present status quo which is clearly recognized as not satisfying instead of choosing the option for progress. The decision to vote against the agreement is the decision to support discrimination of Croats and Bosniacs in the RS and Serbs in the Federation. Practically speaking, it is voting against the improvement of human and national rights. Wishing to have authority and not to have responsibility for it, advocating certain solutions and having no strength to struggle up for them in the legal and institutional way, wishing to have support from people and have no wish to improve the position of the people – is all the way in which hypocritical and irresponsible parties, which do not want to follow the way towards Europe, act. It is concerning however to what extent those parties can afford themselves the luxury to reject that way and it all goes to the cost of their own nation. And, in the end it is not too late for demonstration of political maturity and vision and there is still a possibility to accept the option of progress. The OHR hopes that HDZ and SDA will not be noted as the parties that want to make the present situation in BiH cemented.

Also, I have a couple of short points about the activities of the OHR office over the last period.

As it is known, on Friday 12 April, representatives of international community in Mostar met with the Croatian delegation led by Croatian Foreign Minister, Tonino Picula and Deputy Speaker of Croatian Parliament, dr. Zdravko Tomac. Deputy High Representative Mr. Bercot and OHR are very satisfied with these talks which was a very useful opportunity to exchange views on few issues. This was in the first place on the issue of Constitutional amendments, the consistent implementation of which, it was agreed, is very important for the situation in BiH. The opinion that these constitutional changes are significant step forward was also shared by all participants.

On Monday Deputy High Representative and Head of our office Mr. Bercot hosted a fact finding mission of the ICTY, headed by Deputy Prosecutor Graham T. Blewitt. The visit was of particular relevance, since it was the first of such

a senior official of the Prosecutor's Office to the Mostar area. The High Representative will be meeting the Chief Prosecutor of the Hague Tribunal Carla Del Ponte in Sarajevo today.

In addition, OHR South also received the visit on Monday of Ms. Satu Hassi, Minister for the Development Cooperation of Finland. Minister Hassi and the Deputy High Representative Mr. Bercot had the opportunity to exchange views about the political, social, and economic situation of the area of responsibility of the OHR South.

That is all on behalf of the OHR for the time being. As much as I know, there are no points from OSCE today and therefore I would like to give the floor to Kirsten of the UN.

Kirsten Haupt - UN:

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I have two items for you today. The first concerns payment of salaries in the Ministry of Interior. Last Friday, 12 April, employees of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton Ministry of Interior were paid some of their outstanding salaries. Employees funded by the Croat side of the divided cantonal government account were paid their salary and meal allowance for the month of February. Employees paid by the Bosniac side of the government received their salaries for the month of January and February and the respective meal allowances. The salaries were paid from the Canton 7 divided budgets and the disbursements were co-signed by both the Minister and Deputy Minister of Finance. In response to this payment of salaries, the Bosniac majority police officers union has called off its warning strike.

UNMIBH, however, remains very concerned about the continuing financial crisis in this Canton. The inability of the cantonal government to pay its employees and to cover material expenses creates unnecessary hardship for its cantonal employees. It also hampers the government's ability to provide services to its citizens. UNMIBH again reiterates its earlier concerns that the cantonal government should immediately create a single cantonal budget and treasury. Also, as we have been saying many times before, it would be of great benefit for the citizens of the canton if the cantonal government officials would learn from the example of Ministers of Interior and actually sit together to begin resolving the problems faced by the canton. Unless these conditions are met, UNMIBH will also not be able to realize its efforts towards the complete unification of the Ministry of Interior and ensure regular salaries to the Ministry's employees.

The second item is on an incident that happened this morning in Western Herzegovina Canton. This morning at 5.00 in the place of Studenci near Ljubuski an explosive device went off under the vehicle of the Western Herzegovina Canton Finance Minister Ivan Brkic. Fortunately, no persons were injured but the vehicle was damaged. UNMIBH is very concerned over this extreme violence and expects the police to conduct a robust investigation into this case. IPTF is closely monitoring this investigation.

Maj. Lebrun - MND SE

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, today I have no specific statement but just a last personal message.

This conference is my last one. My four months mission here in Mostar will end in some days. As the Chief of Public Information Office of the Division South East and the Spokesperson, I had quite numerous opportunities to contact local people, journalists and well as the IOs Spokespersons. This second experience in the Balkans was particularly interesting, especially because I have seen that you have reached a peaceful way of life in BIH and you are hardly working on the reconstruction process.

I take advantage of having the floor to mention to all of you here that I have sincerely enjoyed my time working with you, journalists, friends and colleagues. So thank you very much for that.

From my point of view, I hope that BIH will continue on the way to progress and stability. I know that the task is still difficult and that the goodwill of all BIH citizens will be necessary but I sincerely wish you a complete and rapid success. To conclude, let me introduce my successor Lt. Col. Rambaud right here. He arrived last Friday from France. He is a real specialist in international relations and has spent much time in foreign countries. I have no doubt that he will set up good working relationship with you. All the best for you and your families and take care. Thank you for your attention.

Avis Benes:

Thank you Maj. Lebrun. I really hope that there will be an opportunity for you to visit this country maybe for the

third time. On my own and on behalf of my colleagues I really want to thank you for your work and friendship.

Questions

Q: Ivan Bakovic (HTV Mostar): I have a question for Ms. Benes. To what extent are you familiar with the case of construction of a graveyard of displaced persons who live in Bobanovo village? Namely, this graveyard is supposed to be constructed on the site between the village of Lokve and Podlugovi. Last year, there have been some incidents there and that is the reason why I ask this question. According to announcement of the residents of Bobanovo village, they will start with construction works on Saturday. They have received a permit from the Capljina Municipal Council that have allocated the land. Taking into consideration all the aforementioned I would like to know what is the position of the OHR on the construction of this facility?

A: Avis Benes: Yes, I remember that case but at this very moment I have no detailed information. What I do know is the fact that a permit itself of the Municipal Council is not sufficient having in mind the decision of the High Representative about socially owned land, which you are probably aware of. A waiver must be asked from the HR for allocation of socially owned land. This permit can be obtained if the basic criterias are met, some of which are that the construction in question is in public interest and that it is in no violation of stability, peace and I am not sure for the exact formulation but I can provide you with it later on. In any case, the OHR expects that all legal preconditions are met in any construction on socially owned land and that situation will not be created in which some unnecessary tensions will be raised.

Q: Ivan Bakovic (HTV Mostar): Is the High Representative's decision retroactive? Does it annul all previous decisions? As far as I know, decision of the Municipal Council was taken before the High Representative's decision.

A: Avis Benes: Yes, it is.

Q: Ivan Bakovic (HTV Mostar): Does it mean that it annuls all decisions taken since 1992?

A: Avis Benes: Exactly. I will provide you with the text of the decision later on.

Q: Ivan Bakovic (HTV Mostar): Do you then recommend them to address the OHR with a request? In the meantime, I know that they will be having problems with burrial of their deceased ones as the graveyard in Muminovaca is full.

A: Avis Benes: Obviously, it is a realistic problem but the resolution is not in violation of legal regulations.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): Our picture about problems with the Constitutional chnages in whole BIH is not complete as we have a very modest overview about the newest plans of the Republika Srpska. According to some information, they will completely change their decision either today or tomorrow and fully adopt the Sarajevo Agreement. In this context, could you tell us something more about the content of the letter that President of the RS NA Mr. Kalinic addressed to the OHR?

A: Avis Benes: As far as RS plans are concerned, I cannot at this moment tell you anything about them. I also think that the OHR is not completely informed as to what will happen in that regard either. However, it is clear what the expectations of the OHR are – adoption of the amendments that will 100% respect Sarajevo Agreement. As the parties in the Federation had their comments on the amendments adopted by the RS NA, similarly those from the RS had their comments about the amendments that the Federation parties adopted. That is in principle the core of the message.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): If I could follow up on the question of my colleague. I have been following the news constantly and what is not clear to me is the position of the OHR on what the RS parties have done. As you have seen yourself they have all, from the left fraction to the extreme right fraction, voted in favour of the Constitutional changes which are not, as US Ambassador Bond said, in accordance with what was agreed in Sarajevo. However, the OHR has not said anything yet. Mr. Ilija Simic, Chairman of the Alliance Co-ordination, stated that the RS parties have cheated on the OHR. If this happens again, does the OHR have prepared measures? What does the OHR intend to do?

A: Avis Benes: Namely, the fact is that the OHR pointed out that changes need to be made to the version adopted by the RS NA. According to our information it should happen today. As for the results of it, it is maybe better to comment once we see what actually happened. It is very important to mention for so many times in turn now that the OHR will not allow for cheating or adoption of something less than 100% of what was agreed upon by Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement.