

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

Avis Benes - OHR

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

On behalf of the OHR, we have one statement for you today. It refers to the establishment of the joint seat of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton Government.

Deputy High Representative and Head of OHR South Mr. Jean-Pierre Bercot met with Governor and Deputy Governor of Canton 7, Mr. Džiho and Mr. Vrankić, as well as with the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Canton 7, Mr. Corić and Mr. Macić, in order to discuss the process of establishment of the joint seats of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton. As you are all aware, all Cantonal officials, as well as OHR and the International Community, have spent a lot of time and energy on this issue. Mr. Bercot believes that now is the time to finalize this process, and he is satisfied to see that this view is now truly shared by Cantonal officials.

Deputy High Representative Mr. Bercot pointed out that one of the priorities is to find 3 joint seats for the Governor, Prime Minister and President of the Cantonal Assembly and their respective deputies, which is to be immediately followed by finding a solution for the 8 Cantonal ministries. Cantonal officials have promised that by the end of this week, they will provide a concrete and comprehensive action plan for the establishment of joint seats for each governmental authority that is currently divided, and as we all know it is majority of them. It is expected that a concrete realization of that plan is to be implemented afterwards within a very short time-frame.

One of the key priorities of OHR South is the establishment of a joint cantonal government. The second issue is a still open question – the question of a joint budget. It is expected that it will be truly unified and not just a curtain for useless, partial, and parallel structures. This year is crucial and determinate in this process, and OHR will work closely with the Cantonal structures to finally achieve this goal, for the benefit of citizens of the whole Canton.

Namely, according to the plans that are underway we can expect some steps ahead regarding this issue.

This is the main point on behalf of the OHR. In addition, I would have a brief information regarding the visit of the High Representative, Mr. Wolfgang Petrisch, to Mostar. Even though there will be no special press conference, for your information the High Representative will arrive to Mostar on Thursday evening to attend the awards ceremony of Vecernji List. As you know, he has been proclaimed “Media person of the year” by Vecernji List. On Friday, 1 February, there will be a Civic Forum taking place in Mostar which is as you know not a media event but simply a way to strengthen a direct dialogue between the High Representative and various representatives of civil society and other communities in Mostar and the region.

That’s all on behalf of the OHR. Thank you.

Dominique Orsini - UNHCR

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

As UNHCR is responsible for monitoring the implementation of property laws in the municipality Stari Grad, we wish to react to the Mostar TV news broadcast last Thursday, January 24th, which featured the eviction of the Golos family. In this report, TV Mostar accurately pointed out some facts about the case, which are worth repeating:

- MHO Stari Grad issued a 15-day decision to Mr. Golos on May 4th, 2001, nearly 9 months ago.
- Mr. Golos is both an illegal occupant (as he does not have a temporary decision) and double occupant (before the war he lived with his mother who has repossessed her apartment).
- On both counts, Mr. Golos does not have a right to any alternative accommodation.

According to the law, Mr. Golos and his family should have vacated the property long ago. So far, he has used the disability of one of his children to postpone all previously scheduled evictions, even though he was offered alternative solutions to accommodate the special needs of his family. Municipality Stari Grad offered three times to Mr. Golos to pay his rent for a period of six months should he comply with the law and move out of the flat he currently occupies. In addition, he and his family were also offered accommodation in the North camp. Mr. Golos has turned down all offers of help from the municipality.

In addition, in preparation for last Thursday's evictions, special arrangements had been made with the municipal welfare service to put the Golos children in the care of a social worker until the eviction was completed, which should not have taken more than two hours. Once again, the municipality Stari Grad went to a lot of trouble to take the needs of the Golos children into consideration.

UNHCR regrets that these facts were not fully discussed in the report by TV Mostar. We fully support the right to freedom of the press, but consider that the way last Thursday's events were covered by TV Mostar added tension to a situation that was already extremely difficult for all parties. We recognise that TV Mostar had the right to cover the events, but feel that the report inaccurately portrayed the Golos as victims of municipal authorities, which is not true in light of the facts I have just discussed.

UNHCR fully supports the rule of law. And according to the law in this country, an eviction takes place in order to enforce a decision issued in accordance with the Law on cessation of the law on abandoned apartments and in accordance with the Law on administrative procedure. This is what the municipal authorities in Stari Grad attempted to do last Thursday: to enforce a legally binding decision issued by the proper authorities. The social dimension of this case should not mask the fact that what happened last Thursday was first and foremost about enforcement of the law.

Let me conclude by saying that the Golos are not the only people concerned by this case: three other families are waiting for the Golos to vacate the property they illegally occupy to repossession their apartments. They too have a right to return to their property, in accordance with the law, just like any other citizen in this country.

Thank you.

Avis Benes - OHR

In regards to the statement of UNHCR, OHR would like to express its full support to this standpoint. We do not want to single out any particular media or journalist but in general the cases where media creates media heroes and victims of the municipal authorities out of people who are actually violating laws are not isolated; without presenting all sides of story, legal basis of the procedure of the municipal authorities or the fact that these people are occupying someone else's property and that they have been doing this for years. Taking into consideration the fact that there are tragic situations that people who have to vacate someone else's property are faced with and that this is something media should report about as well, it has to be said that one-sided media approach is in discordance with the rules of journalistic professionalism and it represents an obstruction of the implementation of property laws which is one of the fundamental priorities of the international community. In future, in cases of a possible evident media obstruction of the property laws – I am not referring to any specific case – and violation of the media and professional conduct, the OHR will not hesitate to undertake certain measures.

Kirsten Haupt- UNMIBH

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

The first item I want to speak about basically follows the main statement of the OHR from today, that is the establishment of joint seats of Cantonal government offices. Speaking about the Herzegovina Neretva Canton Ministry of Interior, the physical integration of this Ministry is almost completed now. The Southwest municipality is currently vacating offices it was occupying in the Stone building, which further expedites the completion of the physical integration of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton Ministry of Interior. The Ministry of Interior is therefore the first and only governmental institution of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton that will have realised a full and complete physical integration of its offices. Croat and Bosniak employees are working together in the same building and sharing offices without keeping the option of second offices in separate buildings. The model of the Ministry of Interior should send strong signals to the remaining governmental institutions and offices in the Canton to follow suit. We hope that the example of the Ministry of Interior will encourage the Government of Herzegovina

Neretva Canton to expedite their work on the integration of all remaining governmental institutions. By doing this, the Government of this Canton will show the people of this Canton that it is possible to overcome the still existing ethnic divisions.

The Mostar City Police Emergency Telephone Number 92 has been unified again for the entire city for the first time since the beginning of the war. All Mostar residents, regardless of where they are living in this ethnically divided city, can now dial the number 92 on their telephones and reach the Duty Operations Room in the single Mostar Police Administration. Prior to this change, West Mostar residents dialling 92 would reach the former PA Southwest and East Mostar residents dialling the same number would reach the former PA Old Town. The Mostar Chief of Police had to call for the co-operation of HPT in West Mostar and PTT in East Mostar to handle the technical changes in order to unify the single number in the divided telephone systems.

And finally I have two media advisories for you. On Thursday 31st of January, that is tomorrow, the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Jacques Paul Klein, will inaugurate the State Border Service Unit which will be deployed at Mostar airport. The agreement on the take over of the protection of BiH international border and security tasks at Mostar airport will be signed tomorrow by the Director of the State Border Service and the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton Minister of Interior. With the deployment of this new unit, the State Border Service will control all currently operating commercial airports in BiH. A total of 36 officers will be deployed at Mostar airport. The ceremony will start at 11.00 hrs tomorrow morning.

Secondly, the SRSG, Jacques Paul Klein, will also visit Mostar on the 5th of February for meetings with the Governors, the Ministers of Interior, and the Mayors of Mostar. There will be a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the One City – One Police building in Mostar. We will send you a detailed programme of the visit within the coming days.

Thank you

Maj. Lebrun - MND SE

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Today, I have no particular statement for you, but if it is a day of media advisories I have one.

On Thursday, the 31st of January 2002, between 14.00 and 16.00 hrs, Federation Army will perform a de-mining demonstration in close conjunction with SFOR HQ Engineer Branch, at the Carski Vinogradi de-mining site near airport Mostar. Major General Palmer, Deputy Commander Operations of SFOR, Rear Admiral Edelstone, Military Assistant to the OHR and the Director of the BiH Mine Action Center, Mr. Filipovic will attend this demonstration.

The de-mining demonstration will include manual de-mining techniques, mechanical ground preparation and Explosive Detection Dog Teams. A 30-minute media opportunity will be then given to the journalists.

Those wishing to attend this de-mining demonstration are invited to inform MNDSE Public Information Office by fax or e-mail. A meeting point will be then defined. For further information regarding the activity itself, please contact the SFOR Coalition Press Information Center in Sarajevo. For a better understanding, you will find copies of the CPIC media advisory. Please feel free to take one before leaving the conference room.

Thanks for your attention.

Questions

Q: Nermin Bise (Oslobodjenje): I have two questions for OHR. Is the OHR Human Rights Department aware of the case of Mostar High School teacher, Miro Milicevic, who pointed to irregularities in the Catering School. You may know of the story that HDZ will get the premises in the school building? Secondly, you said that there will be certain measures undertaken against media. Isn't it a competency of the CRA?

A: Avis Benes: Thank you for your questions. As far as the second question is concerned and the measures I have mentioned certainly and logically it can be done by the OHR as well as every single citizen – which is to lodge an appeal with the CRA if he/she thinks that certain media report is not in accordance with the code of conduct for the media. When I said 'certain measures' I did not think of any out-institutional measures. Certainly I meant only measures that exist within the existing system.

As for your first question, I would have to check this with our Human Rights Department. At this very moment, I cannot give you any detail information about it.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): A question for SFOR. It has been discovered that those who were smuggling oil between BiH and Croatia have been using SFOR documents. Could you give us more details about this case? How is SFOR planning to protect itself from misuse of your name by smugglers?

A: Maj. Lebrun: As I know it is not in the AoR of our Division. It is in South-West. We always take preventive measures. But if you want more details I think you must call PIO of South-West Division.

Q: Mirsad Behram (TVMO): A question for UNHCR and OHR – I do not want to get involved in a discussion about this issue but however your statements provoked me to say something. Namely, from the legal point of view everything is as you said. However, they are in an extremely difficult financial situation. Could you please tell me from that aspect what is the solution that you are practically recommending?

A: Dominique Orsini - UNHCR: It is not for me to recommend a solution. Solution has already been recommended. And like I said in my statement, there is a decision and decision has to be enforced. This is the law. And like I said in the statement as well, the municipality has taken steps to try to address some of the difficulties that this family is experiencing. And other solutions that the municipality has come forward with have been rejected by the family. And also like I said there are three families who are waiting to repossess their property and they are waiting for this property to be vacated. So there is no one family at stake but another three families who are also waiting.

A: Avis Benes: Taking into consideration this whole tragic situation, especially in this wave of evictions that are taking place in this intensified process of implementation of property laws, I think that in the end of the day it is not on the media to resolve social cases by taking sides but to present the situation in an objective manner, pointing out problems that are realistic problems. In this particular case, the gentleman in question was not entitled to alternative accommodation but very often there is a situation that neither cantonal nor municipal authority can offer alternative accommodation. This is the problem that the OHR and other international organizations have been referring to quite often. You probably recall our appeals on transparency of cantonal budget, in which around a million marks has been assigned for refugees and alternative accommodation on the side of two Ministries but we could find out where was this money going to or is going to. In any case, the situation here is very complex and I think that the media should present the complete picture.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTVMO): First of all, I am not taking the side of this gentleman. After all, it is not his fault for the fact that it is not known where this money went. Secondly, on several occasions you mentioned that the Center for Social Care does not have money. How can then this Center resolve anybody's case?

A: Avis Benes: I have emphasized that it does not refer to this case, I was talking about this issue in general. Very often it happens that people who are entitled to alternative accommodation cannot get one.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): Yesterday, Kneza Domagoja St. in Mostar, where the Hercegovacka bank building is located, was blocked and closed for traffic for 1 hour. SFOR members were seen on the spot. Some of the witnesses saw representatives of SFOR around. Was SFOR taking part in the blockage of the street or not?

A question for UN – There are already speculations in public linking the two robberies that took place the other day – the robbery of Hypo Bank vehicle near Jablanica when some 550,000 KM were stolen and another one in Tesanj where some 850,000 KM were stolen. I have been trying to reach somebody from the Ministry of Interior to get some specific information but unsuccessfully. Could you tell us some information about it?

A: Maj. Lebrun: Perhaps I must begin because my response is very short. My response is NO. We are only making regular patrolling around this place because I have been asked yesterday about this problem. We do not have been involved in the problem of the yesterday.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): But, carabinieri did not allow the people to take that street....

A: Maj. Lebrun: Yes, but always when I speak I speak for our Division. If you want some details about this, it is SFOR PIO. But Division is not involved in this problem.

A: Kirsten Haupt: Regarding the two robberies – I cannot give you any details on the Tesanj case. The second

case I believe the one that you are referring to happened on Monday in the tunnel. I can give you only basic details that we know from the police that has been dealing with this case. Yesterday there was a robbery in the afternoon of Monday in the tunnel on the M17, south of Mostar. I do not know whether I got the name of the tunnel right, Lendava. The facts that could have been established so far are VW Golf of the Hypo Alpe Adria Bank was stopped and robbed. The claim is that cash in various currencies in an alleged amount of 600,000 was taken at this point. The escape vehicle that has been used on this occasion has been found yesterday, totally burned, in the vicinity of Prozor. Now, what concerns connection between two cases at this point is mere speculation. Also the connection with organized crime obviously. You fully understand that while investigations into these cases are ongoing, for this time being we cannot reveal any ideas or suggestions in any relation to these cases. It would be a mere speculation.

Q: Alija Bijavica (Radio Stari Most): When will the lights be put in the tunnels?

A: Avis Benes: Whom is this question addressed to? Unfortunately, we do not have a reply to this question.