

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 is a special occasion and I have a special pleasure to introduce to you a new member of the International Community in Mostar. That is Ambassador Thomas Timberman who is the new Head of the OSCE office in Mostar. It is my pleasure to give him the floor.

Ambassador Thomas Timberman - OSCE

Dobar dan dame i gospodo, and that is extent of my language knowledge. I want to tell you how personally pleased I am to be back in Mostar. As some of you may already know, I worked on a South-eastern European cultural and educational program for the US Government during 1999 and 2000. After visiting a number of cities in the region, I selected Mostar to be the headquarters for my program. So, I have been here four-five times mostly in the year 2000 but I have begun to prepare for this in 1999. There were three reasons why I selected Mostar and why I accepted the offer of this position: I believe that this city Mostar embodies both the beauty and achievements of a long and distinguished history. It also embodies the personal and physical tragedies of the more recent past; my new job offers me another opportunity to work as a junior partner with the very intelligent, creative and dedicated members of the local society; I firmly believe that if this city Mostar and the region around it can adjust to the demands of the modern world, then the city can serve as a model for the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina. When I was here before I noticed that there was a special spirit here that is quite unique.

This special atmosphere and the special quality of Mostar and Herzegovina and the wider region is known far beyond this country. I recall a conversation I had with a professor at the University of Arkansas last month who, when he learned I was coming here said: "Are you really going to that magical place with the beautiful bridge?" When I said yes, he responded: "I visited there in 1977 and it must be rebuilt." He was very pleased when I told him that this project is already well in hand. However, for me the professor's point is the larger one, because for me it is not only buildings here that need to be put back together, but the society itself.

Last time I visited, as I said, was in 2000, it was October of the year 2000 and I am happy to see how much real progress has been made in all sectors of this society, whether the members of this society are entrepreneurs, professors, artists, architects, government officials or soldiers, many of them are working towards this common goal. These progressive members of your society share one thing in common: they understand for Bosnia-Herzegovina and our region here it is essential to join the mainstream world or the standard of living of its citizens, that is all of you, and its international position will definitely suffer; these people also understand the hard truth that is the preconditions for this country to transit to the modern world, whether we talk economics, politics, social programs, all of the preconditions are set by those nations, countries, states who have already arrived in the modern world.

It took countries like the UK, France, Germany, Spain, the US and many others, several centuries to achieve the characteristics that we talk about as the modern world. Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have this luxury. But what you have is experience of almost two thousand years of critical turning points when equally hard adjustments and changes were made. All segments of society have to work together to make this very important turn in the road.

I was very happy to see yesterday that this country has been invited to join the Council of Europe. This is a very important step towards full membership in the modern community of states.

While I have obviously very much to learn and understand, I already know that, for instance, very significant parliamentary action has already been taken: the passing of the Election Law, the Election Commission's assumption of full responsibility as well as the earlier fiscal, economic and social and property legislation testifies to the progress that has been made. The basic human rights, for instance, to return to one's home and/or business is being enjoyed today by many more people than enjoyed it two-three years ago when I first started coming here.

These people are also beginning to relearn the advantages of living normally with their neighbours. However, as with every post-war situation, the beginnings of recovery are very slow but the momentum in my experience does accelerate.

While it's almost a cliché to say, as so many internationals do, that the youth of a country are the hope of the future, like all accepted wisdom, it contains some truth. However, all age groups, we are not talking just youth here, all age groups have to see a better future. Young people here have many memories, as do their elders and present impressions that could lead them to conclude they have to travel abroad in order to have the future. I think for everyone, and for me, the economy is a fundamental basic requirement to change a society. Jobs have to be created. With work, a normal life and normal ambitions can be possible. The bottom line, as we say in English, is the bottom line.

I have talked far too long. I look forward to working with all members of the media and it only remains to say: hvala.

Avis Benes - OHR:

Thank you Ambassador Timberman. We all wish you a lot of satisfaction and success in your work.

On behalf of the OHR, I have one very local topic but not less important though. OHR South met with officials from the Mostar City municipality West as a follow up to the December meeting held with the Head of Mostar West, Ljubo Golemac, on the issue of the construction by "Interinvest" of housing-business premises at the site of the Mostar Electro-Mechanical school. As a reminder, this construction began without first seeking a waiver as required by the High Representative's Decision on Re-allocation of Socially Owned land. Hence the Municipality West issued an inspection decision on 12 December 2001 requesting the work to stop with immediate effect. The municipality also submitted a request for land waiver to the OHR in Sarajevo. OHR is concerned that a legal municipal decision was openly disregarded by "Interinvest" which continued to work on the site until 2 days ago. We call upon the responsible persons to abide by the Law and that all work ceases until a solution is reached. Moreover, we expect that a solution for Electro-Mechanical School is to be found in the near future, also having in mind that this school is at the moment dispersed into four different locations in Mostar. That would be all concerning this issue. This statement is available in a written form.

In the end, a reminder that on Friday, 25 January, Mostar and our Canton will be visited by Senior Deputy High Representative Ambassador Matthias Sonn and Principal Deputy High Representative Ambassador Donald Heys from the OHR Sarajevo. They will meet both city and cantonal officials but we will issue a media advisory with more detailed information, including the time-line for the press conference, which will probably take place somewhere around 14.00 hrs.

Sanja Alikafic - UNHCR

Good afternoon on behalf of UNHCR. UNHCR is pleased to announce that a hand over of 10 reconstructed houses and flats for collective centers residents took place yesterday, 22 January, 2002. The houses were located on the whole area covered by UNHCR Southern Office for BIH, e.g. Stolac, Prozor/Rama, Jablanica. The project was completed jointly with Swiss Disaster Relief, SDR.

Thank.

Kirsten Haupt- UNMIBH

Good morning. First thing I want to talk about, a follow up to some remarks of Ambassador Tiberman, mainly regarding the decision of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly to recommend the approval of Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for admission to the Council of Europe. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jacques Paul Klein, has welcomed this decision. He believes that this is a historical step in defining the country's national identity through membership in a common value system based on the respect for individual freedoms, rule of law and participatory government. Copies of the press release and translation will be available

after the briefing.

Second thing I want to talk about is an initiative that UNMIBH launched this week. This is a major initiative to systematically assess the structure and operations of law enforcement agencies in BiH. The project which is known as "systems analysis" is part of a continuing programme to ensure policing institutions in BiH meet European standards. On Monday 21 January, the programme entered an important phase when a team of UNMIBH financial and organisational experts began an on-site study of police institutions in Brcko. The Brcko experience will then be used as a model throughout the country in the coming months. The system analysis will be completed in September 2002 and will coincide with the certification of individual officers.

The project will look at all aspects of police work. These range from accounting and personnel practices, and arrest and custody procedures, to report writing and inventory control. It will identify structural deficiencies that allow or encourage misconduct by individual officers. At the same time, best working practices will be strengthened. In the past a number of deficiencies in the work of law enforcement agencies was revealed. Some of the problems identified were inefficiency, weak protection against corruption, and inadequate financial, personnel and disciplinary procedures. Redress systems, not only for the police officers themselves, but also for the public at large, have remained underdeveloped. Overstaffing continues to be another problem. This new systems analysis is designed to address these problems and reinforce the progress BiH has made on the way to modern, democratic law enforcement.

Lastly, UNMIBH started another recruitment campaign for the State Border Service. The SBS is looking for candidates for new SBS units and for vacant positions in other already established SBS units. In this round of vacancy announcements, candidates are invited to apply for positions in three SBS units that are going to be established in Strmica, Gorica and Visegrad. Further vacancies are advertised in the middle and higher management SBS HQ in Sarajevo, mainly in the training centre, in administration and communications. As always application forms can be obtained at any IPTF station. For further information, potential applicants can contact the SBS directly in Lukavica. I will give you a telephone numbers for those who are interested: 057/340 002, or 340 015. If you want a confirmation for these two numbers, you can contact me after the press conference.

Thank you.

Maj. Lebrun - MND SE

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, today I have only one statement for you, regarding the helicopter accident, which took place off the coast of Ploce, in Croatia on last Sunday morning. The Division Commander expresses his sincere gratitude towards the Croatian authorities and all the people involved in the alert transmission as well as the first rescue operations of the crew. First, there is no doubt that the spontaneous initiative taken by the two fishermen from the village of Blace, was decisive for the life of the injured crew members. Then, the professionalism and the efficiency of the Croatian police in recovering the casualties must be noticed and emphasised. The commanding officer of the Multinational Aviation Battalion will personally thank the authorities as well as the citizens of Ploce in the next coming days.

Thanks for your attention.

Questions

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA) – I have a question for SFOR. Could you tell us some more details regarding the helicopter accident. According to some unconfirmed information, the helicopter exploded before it hit the water, while according to some speculations it was a sabotage?

A: Maj. Lebrun: At this time, we cannot get any information more about the accident, because investigation is ongoing now. Perhaps we know in short days or weeks more information about this accident and if we can give this information, we will give them.