

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

Oleg Milisic - OHR

I am sure that you all watched with horror the events yesterday in New York and Washington. The High Representative and his entire staff are shocked and appalled by the terrorist attacks in the US. We are extending our heartfelt sympathies to the victims, their families and friends, and the entire nation of the US, a country that has contributed a great deal to bringing lasting peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

My second point concerns the meeting of the Political Directors of the Steering Board. Today and tomorrow the Political Directors of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board are meeting in Brussels. Today, the focus will be on a meeting between the High Representative, the Steering Board and BiH state and entity officials, who will discuss economic reforms and the EU's Stabilisation and Association Process. The requirements that have been placed on Bosnia and Herzegovina so that a feasibility study for such an agreement can be made are commonly known as the "Road Map". Several countries from the region are trying to establish similar relations with the EU.

As I said, the meeting will be attended by a delegation from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The delegation will include: Zlatko Lagumdžija - Chair of the Council of Ministers and Bosnia and Herzegovina Foreign Minister, Dragan Mikerevic - Bosnia and Herzegovina Minister for European Integration, Ante Domazet - Bosnia and Herzegovina Minister for Treasury, Karlo Filipovic - President of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Behmen - Prime Minister of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Mladen Ivanic - the Prime Minister of Republika Srpska. There is going to be a short photo opportunity at the start of the meeting. There will be a short photo opportunity at the start of this meeting. We did issue a media advisory yesterday. If any of you did not get it and have correspondents in Brussels and would like to send them to this, please get in contact with our Press Office.

Tomorrow, the Steering Board Political Directors and the High Representative will meet to discuss the economic situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the steps that need to be taken by the local authorities to improve it. Further agenda items are the election law implementation, ensuring that the elections are held on time next year, and the streamlining of operations of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As usual after tomorrow's meeting the Steering Board will issue a communiqué and you should all get that.

My final point concerns the economic public awareness campaign that the Office of the High Representative has started. As I said, the campaign will be devoted to the topic of economic reform, which the High Representative has on several occasions announced as one of the OHR strategic priorities. The campaign will show what Bosnia and Herzegovina will look like in the future if the necessary reforms are carried out now. And the campaign aims to motivate people to support these reforms. As you know, reforms are not easy, but unavoidable if Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to recover economically. The campaign was produced by the Centre for Contemporary Arts Sarajevo, which last year produced the Ovak and Onak anti-corruption campaign, so you will see some similarities.

The campaign consists of five-part animated story. The broadcasting of this story will start on Monday 17th September and will be carried by RTV BiH, Test, RTRS and the Mreza Plus network.

There are also 10 radio spots, which are so-to-say "news from the future" - the type of news from the economic field that would be a commonplace in a prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina. 30 radio stations around Bosnia and Herzegovina have been airing them since the 24th August. In addition, we have 60 jumbo posters, which you may have already seen around the country, since they went up on the 1st August. There are also 4 short TV spots that announced the campaign, and there will also be 3,000 VHS tapes which will be distributed to video stores in Bosnia and Herzegovina for free.

Capt. Simonini - MND SE

Despite the horrible recent attack against the US, to which we express our deepest sorry, life is continuing over here and SFOR will remain the same in BiH. However, no urgent task or meeting may be cancelled on short notice.

Today, I have one statement regarding exercise Indian Summer. Indian Summer exercise will take place from the 18th to the 19th September, 2001, in both the Federation as well as in the RS in the following municipalities: Posusje, Grude, Siroki Brijeg, Ljubinje and Trebinje. You may see new unit deployed in these municipalities during the exercise. This exercise is one of the continuous series of training exercises, as you have seen in the past. This safe exercise has specifically been designed to test the ability of MND SE reserve to rapidly re-deploy and conduct operations anywhere in its AoR. In conclusion, Indian Summer is a clear demonstration of MND SE's capability and determination to immediately and if required respond to any violation of the General Framework Agreement for peace in BiH. However, due to the present situation this exercise might be cancelled.

Questions

Vlatko Menix (Croat Info Center): Mr. Milisic, to what extent the damage and destruction of the Cross at Hum and Lokve in Dubrave can be brought into connection with the terrorist attacks that occurred yesterday in the USA? A question for SFOR – who is registering all pieces of the weapons that are being collected and destroyed during the Harvest operation? This question is in the connection with the media writings from last week that certain pieces of weapons were discovered in the French underground.

Oleg Milisic: First of all, I have to say that I am not aware of details related to that case. Any destruction of religious facilities is something that is unacceptable. It is a question that the local police have to tackle directly and immediately, that perpetrators are found and that legal procedure is carried out. You asked if this could be connected with the developments in New York. I think it could be a mere speculation.

Capt. Simonini: Regarding your question, first of all I am not aware of details of your information, but I can say that during the Harvest operation, as you all know, the authorities are involved and it is not only SFOR. First of all, I have to say that we have to pay attention that speculations can be made on such matter. So, at the end you should address such a question to the SFOR level where they collect all the information.

Vlatko Menix (Croat Info Center): Does it mean that you denied a possibility that certain pieces of the weapons collected during the Harvest operation could have been found in France.

Capt. Simonini: It seems very strange to me.

Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): Mr. Milisic, during the tragedy that happened in New York and Washington yesterday, the leading military officials of the US, more precisely General Clark and Richard Holbrooke, the people who were involved in the resolution of crisis in the Balkans, stated that after yesterday's developments nothing will be the same at the planetary level. Given the national and religious mixture of the population in BiH, does your office have some sort of a message after yesterday's development?

Oleg Milisic: As I said before, the first message was our deepest condolences to the families, and I think that the High Representative will address this issue later today.

Marko-Antonio Brkic (BiH Radio 1): What is the reaction of the OHR to the announcements of the Federation Government about a new, eventual audit in Aluminijum?

Oleg Milisic: After the audit that was carried out, our position is that it is now important for the Federation Government and Aluminijum to start concrete talks in order to resolve the issues which came out. It is really important that these talks are carried out in order to see the way further.

Marko-Antonio Brkic (BiH Radio 1): Does this mean that the Federation Government is conveying a message to the OHR that OHR is not capable of carrying out something which is called an audit, and that therefore the Federation Government plans to carry out another one?

Oleg Milisic: I would not agree with that at all. As I said and as you know the audit carried out by the independent team was a legal audit and the Federation Government is proposing a financial audit. It is very important that the Aluminijum and the Federation Government start direct talks in order to see what would be the way to proceed.

Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): Mr. Milisic, given that Americans are going to pay attention to their own affairs,

are there any assessment in the OHR that any hard line fraction in BiH might take things into its hands or eventually deteriorate the situation?

Oleg Milisic: As I said before, the US Government and the US state gave a great contribution to the implementation of the peace process in BiH. After the recent developments, of course that they will want to investigate and pay attention to that matter, but it does not mean exclusion from the process in BiH. And it is too early to speak about this in details today.

Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): Capt. Simonini, several TV stations reported that the level of security measures have been increased in the SFOR Tuzla Base Eagle. Is that the case with your base in Mostar as well?

Capt. Simonini: What I can tell you is that I cannot discuss security details with you. But SFOR will remain vigilant and take appropriate actions to protect our forces.

Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): Representatives of SFOR in Tuzla gave a public statement about it. I do not see the reason why should not you respond. It is a very simple question – yes or no?

Capt. Simonini: I understand what you mean, but each Commander in each base has its own rules and general procedures that should be followed and I cannot discuss it.