

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

Avis Benes, OHR Spokesperson:

I apologize for having to start this press conference with little bit of the delay but I hope that it will not be a problem.

Thank you once again for coming to this press conference of the IOs working and seated in Mostar. We have two statements on the behalf of the OHR. The first one is about incident that happened in front of the Mostar Gymnasium building, and the second one is about the seats of Cantonal Ministries. Later on you will be able to get these statements in written as well.

First statement is about hooligan incident :

OHR S strongly condemns the latest incident which occurred last Friday, February 01.02 in front of the Mostar Gymnasium (Fra Dominik Mandic school), in which a student of this school was injured. In a quick reaction police have identified the perpetrators as 6 minors with residence in Mostar municipalities with Bosniac majority. To our knowledge, misdemeanor and criminal charges will be filed against them and their parents individually- not everyone of them will be charged for misdemeanor and criminal act, but against some of them criminal charges will be filed , and against others misdemeanor charges will be filed. OHR welcomes the prompt action of the police, and expects such an efficient reaction in the future such circumstances.

Unfortunately, this hooligan behavior has occurred previously on a few occasions, without adequate or any sanctions for the perpetrators. Mostar Gymnasium-I will call it for now Mostar Gymnasium even though we know that its official name is Fra Dominik Mandic school, and its students have for some time been a target of group of vandalistic minors where the safety of school children has been jeopardized. It is also possible that some hooligans have been politicized by some ill-intended individuals. However, If there is anyone who might think that such actions could help in resolving the polemics on the future of the Mostar Gymnasium, such person would be greatly mistaken.

OHR believes that the Mostar Gymnasium, traditionally an institution of educational excellence which belongs to all the people of Mostar, should serve to all of Mostar's children. Agreement on that should naturally be reached in the spirit of cooperation and goodwill, keeping the best interests of children in mind, school youth or however you want to call them. We again appeal to the relevant authorities to show more activity in order to obtain foreign funds and donations , which will not be available forever, for reconstruction of this school.

And now one general statement about these politicized hooligans incidents we want to emphasize that criminal behavior of politicized minors has not been a specificity only in the case of the Mostar Gymnasium. Recent incidents of bus-stoning in Mostar and Stolac, last December's incidents in Stolac's high school, and the improper behavior in Dreznica involving school children of both national groups in acts of violence and hooliganism, are a reason for deep concern. These acts cannot be lightly dismissed on account of the age of those involved- they are the reflection of society as well as the result of insufficient parental and educational guidance.

Children gain their basic values in their homes and school, and such conveyed values must be of those of tolerance, civilized behavior and condemning of hooliganism. In this sense a parental responsibility especially should be reminded of.

Second thing is about last week announcement when we said that we expect to get a complete plan that was supposed to be presented to us by Cantonal officials, and following this promise made by Cantonal officials on 29th of January, JPB, DHR and the Head of OHR South has received a partial plan of joint seats of Cantonal Ministries. This was delivered to him by PM, Miroslac Coric and DHR expresses his thanks for respecting the deadline.

There are some more details about how joint seats for H-N Canton bodies of authority will be organized.

The offices of Canton PM and his Deputy will be permanently occupying former offices of SSRN in Aleksa Santic street. They have already started with the works to speed up the process of moving in.

The offices of Assembly President and his Deputy will be placed at the New Building right across the Cantonal Court building.

The office of Governor and his Deputy will be temporary placed at address Stjepana Radica #3 (Student Dormitory building).

As we already know MIA will occupy Stone Building premises, and they have already started with moving.

Ministry of Finances will be permanently placed in the former Payment Operations offices located at Kneza Domagoja street.

The Student Dormitory Building will temporary host the offices of Ministry for Culture, Education and Sport and Ministry of Urban development and Landscaping.

On the other side where the offices of Ministry of Justice, public administration and self-governing will be placed is not known for now, and it will be decided soon in agreement with DHR South.

However this plan , as it can be seen is not complete. Bosniac officials in the Canton did not submit their proposal relating to the accommodation of the Ministries, as they had previously agreed to do. Moreover, there is obviously a lack of coordination among the Cantonal officials. Both of these aspects of this situation are impermissible.

Mr. Bercot expects that by the end of this week OHR South will receive the second part of the plan from Deputy PM Omer Macic, and that coordination amongst Cantonal officials will improve. This process, the process of finding a seats for Cantonal Ministries, should be completed as soon as possible as there is no more time to be lost on this issue.

That is all on a behalf of OHR.

Ludvik Skoberne, OSCE Spokesperson:

Good afternoon, for today I have to short statements. The first one is about the Round Table of BIH journalist that was held on Saturday.

OSCE strongly supports initiatives like the one that was organized by journalistic association APPEL and Mostar radio station 88, that took place last Saturday. It was encouraging to hear how journalists are keen to improve their work to enable the public to get adequate information.

We understand that important tool to improve quality of journalistic work is new Law of free access to information which became effective at the end of the last week. By provisions of this Law authorities will be obliged to provide information not only to journalists but also to the citizens.

And secondly something about the incidents at Mostar Gymnasium.

OSCE condemns incident that happened last Friday when a student of Mostar Gymnasium was seriously hurt. This incident is a matter of a serious concern, because it shows that tolerance in Mostar and elsewhere in the country, is still very low.

Next is more and more evident how present economic situation negatively affects the youth. Practically, they do not have a realistic chance to get good education and job.

It is additionally sad when such events take place in or at Gymnasium premises as this institution is known as one of the finest educational centers before the war

Kirsten Haupt, UN Spokesperson:

Yesterday's inauguration of the One City One Police of Mostar by SRSJ Jacques Paul Klein was a great success. We would like to congratulate the Minister of Interior Goran Bilic, the Deputy Minister Sead Sehic, the Chief of the Mostar Police Administration Zijo Orucevic and all the men and women who presented the Mostar Police as a unified police administration. Not only during the ceremony at the Mostar Police Administration, but over the entire day the efficient functioning of the single Mostar police administration was very noticeable in the superb organization of the entire event. UNMIBH would like to take this opportunity again to also congratulate the Canton 7 Governors, Prime Ministers and Assembly members for taking the bold step to amend the Law on Internal Affairs which enabled the establishment of a single police administration in Mostar. The former six divided police administrations only benefited criminals.

Regarding the integration of the Ministry of Interior, the SRSJ pointed out that there were still some outstanding issues to complete the full integration of the Ministry of Interior. He urged the cantonal government to move towards the unification of the budget to achieve the full functional integration of the Ministry of Interior. In his meeting with the minister of Interior, Bilic, and Deputy Minister of Interior Sehic, the SRSJ stressed that for a full integration of the ministry a fully functioning, unified chain of command and the elimination of parallel structures within the ministry was essential and necessary.

Police to wear federal badges and patches

Yesterday evening another mile stone achievement in the integration of the Ministry of Interior was reached. During his visit, the SRSJ Klein pointed out that still not all police officers were unified in terms of the shoulder patches and cap badges - some were wearing the Federation insignia and some not. Later in the day an agreement was reached between UNMIBH and the Ministry of Interior that starting on 21st February, all police officers in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton would wear Federation insignia on their uniform. The introduction of unified insignia constitutes a significant step forward in the integration of the Ministry of Interior. This is only a temporary solution. When the Canton 7 Government and Assembly finally adopts a Canton insignia the police would wear that on their shoulders. However, according to the High Representative Decision of 1999 all police officers in all Cantons in the Federation must wear the Federation cap badge.

Incident at Gymnasium at Spanish square in Mostar

In relation to the recent incident at the Gymnasium at the Spanish Square in Mostar, we would like to stress that UNMIBH condemns any form of violence and vandalism, especially when committed by juveniles. We firmly believe that violence and vandalism cannot contribute to the solution of any problem. UNMIBH expects the Ministry of Interior to fully investigate all incidents and bring the perpetrators to justice. At this point there is a permanent police patrol stationed outside of the Gymnasium and through investigation are under way. Up till now, six juveniles were identified and questioned by the police. Three of them will be criminally charged, one for inflicting serious physical injuries and two for damaging private property. Currently the police are establishing the identity of five more juveniles who are suspected of having participated in this incident. Further charges can be expected in the course of investigation.

It is however UNMIBH's hope that this school which represents the multi-ethnic past of this city in the best traditions of this city will once again become multi-ethnic school bringing together students from all sides of the ethnic divide. It should be a symbol again of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of Mostar rather than symbol of its division. In this connection we call on the media to report correctly on any kind of incidents based on established facts. Any incorrect reporting or misinformation is counterproductive and can only serve to raise the tensions.

Major Lebrun, SFOR Spokesperson:

Parade in Ploce (Croatia)

On Saturday, 9th of February, between 12:45 and 13:40 a parade will take place in Ploce.

During the parade, three Croat civilian people will be decorated with the French "Medaille de la Defense nationale" in award of their courageous act that enabled the rescue of the crew of the helicopter "Gazelle" which crashed on the 20th of January.

This parade will be chaired by MNDSE Commander, General Amarge.

I want only to stress one more time that without the courageous behavior of these civilian people the fatalities would be higher.

A media opportunity will be provided to get interviews of the new decorated Croatian citizens, and of the SFOR officer in charge of the rescue.

Media representative wishing to attend the parade are to send back, via fax or e-mail to the PIO of MNDSE, the media advisory, that you can find here. Thank you.

Questions

Pejo Gasparevic, HINA, BBC: One can hear from a tones from the USA Embassy that difficult decisions in this country are in the future supposed to be taken by the local bodies, authorities and structures. This seems to be a symbol of new orientation of the International Community in BiH. My question is the following: – How would you assess the conversation that took place in Mrakovica and the conversation of the political leaders in BiH?

Avis Benes: The entire OHR and the High Representative welcome the talks in Mrakovica and Sarajevo and they think that it is the right way and good approach leading toward the solution of many important issues here.

As of the new trend as you said I can tell you that the OHR, since the HR Wolfgang Petrisch took over his duty he has been encouraging and pushing forward the principle of the ownership and that domestic, national structures should tackle more issues with a less involvement of international structures.

Unfortunately many times so far the domestic national authorities used to transfer their responsibilities and many times when some difficult decisions were being made they took the easier way out and the responsibility was transferred to the International Community.

The OHR hopes and expects that in the future political parties , people and the citizens will directly be involved and participate in making the decisions which affect themselves and their destiny in BiH.

Ludvik Skoberne: I would just welcome what Avis just had said and I would also say that the mandate of the IC in BiH is not endless. Sooner the authorities of BiH will take over , sooner the time will come when the IC won't be needed here. I think that political dialogue among the political parties is a good thing and it should be something which should happen more frequently.

Mirjana Simunovic, Radio Herceg Bosna: The HR has taken a number of decisions in regards to Property Laws, one of them is that he prohibits the Public attorneys to verify new contracts. Which means that until 1990 if wife and husband who were living together , and the husband was a tenancy right holder, and his wife as a spouse was a tenancy right holder, after her husbands death loses the right to enjoy this right , and this new amendment is prohibiting her to get the verification of that contract. There are plenty of cases like this, what next?

Avis Benes: The fact is that by the set of property laws issued in December last year some provisions were made stricter, also some provisions regarding new contracts and their verification. The purpose of those provisions was not to take these rights from the widows, but to avoid the manipulations with the apartments through illegal purchases. At this time the Public Attorneys are doing their job the right way, in a line with the law, even though this law has a negative influence on some people who were not intended to be hurt by these new provisions. That ban is just a temporary suspension on new contract, and the persons affected by these provisions will be able to have their property. On that issue, later on I can give you a full legal explanation, even in written.

Mirsad Behram, Radio TV Mostar, VoA: As far as I know Mr. Jelavic who has been removed by the HR from the position of the HDZ president said that Mr. Petrisch itself will be responsible if the proclamation of the third entity is proclaimed. In that sense what is your opinion/view to the fact that If I am correct that 165 charges will be submitted to the European Human Rights court , because Mr. Petrisch has dismissed Mr. Jelavic from his duty as a president of HDZ?

I would like to get more detailed explanation about the possibility of Mostar being the capital of the Federation? As you know there are a plenty of people who thinks that Mostar does not fulfill all the conditions for this possibility, and you said that Mostar should not be proud of the rate of property laws implementation.

Avis Benes: As for the first question you asked I think that the people can not regard this as a serious statement, it was maybe directed to get some space in a press rather than thinking that HR would be the person taken responsible for the third entity. After all this might be the attempt to transfer the responsibilities for absolutely counterproductive moves which had been made in that regard. Under the present circumstances when unquestionably important discussions on the decision of constitutional court is on and when permanent and long-lasting solutions in terms of that decisions are being seeked, it is not productive to go back to rhetoric for which even Mr. Jelavic admitted in the past was not successful (i.e. the issue of third entity).

As of the alleged 165 complaints filed to the Human Rights court, that it is in a way something also superficially and not seriously let into the media space. The very fact that a name of court in question is wrong, it is not the International court for Human Rights but the European Court for Human Rights, is something that says for itself what kind of the approach has been taken. OK, that is only a formality but basically some things have to be emphasized when it comes to the essence of possibilities of these complaints. First no one can file a complaint to that court before the BIH is admitted to the Council of Europe – which we hope will happen soon- and then the ratification of the Convention on Human Rights is to be made. Moreover, the court may consider the request/claims submitted by the state that had ratified the Convention only after the date of Convention ratification. So all the events/issues that had happened before the ratification would not be taken into consideration. Complaints filed to this court are the complaints against the states not the individuals, and after all the Court would consider complaints only after all legal steps/remedies were exhausted. So all those complaints should be filed from the lowest court level all the way to the Supreme Court in the State. There are some more technical details but I think that what I just have said is enough to illustrate this whole story.

The truth is that IC in general , and OHR especially always gave their support in principal to the Mostar as a capital of the Federation. There were the moments where this idea from time to time has culminated, and there were the proposals by some people who were here previously. In any case, Mostar has a specific place in Dayton agreement and there are certain requirements that have to be fulfilled. If the Mostar as a city fulfills certain unification requirements , the IC would think that it would be a good idea , the good thing for certain balances to be created in BIH where centers of powers would be Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar.

Tina Jelin, Studio 88: A certain time has passed since the Chief of Municipality South-West has been dismissed from his duty, and I am interested If there is anything new happening regarding this issue?

Avis Benes: We expect the proposals to come on the behalf of the Municipality SW and then we will go through adequate procedures, so we are at that stage right now.