

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. Our colleague Kirsten Haupt of the UN apologises for not being able to attend today's press conference.

On behalf of the OHR, I have three points for you today.

First, as a follow-up to Deputy High Representative and Head of OHR South's statement at last week's press conference, Mr. Berçot would like to thank Prime Minister Coric and Deputy Prime Minister Macic for their concise joint letter, as well as for their joint Action Plan for the integration of the ministries of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, which was also presented to Mr. Berçot and OHR South yesterday.

This Action Plan, as defined and co-signed by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, finally establishes two clear and concrete deadlines. The first is 10 March 2002, which is when the Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Policy is to be integrated in Lacina Street number 8, as well as when the Ministry of Traffic and Communication is to be integrated in Osmana Djikica Street number 8. The second deadline is set for 15 March 2002, when the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport is to be placed at Djacki Dom, as is the Ministry of Construction, Urban Planning and Environment. As it is known, the Ministries of Finance and Interior have already been jointly located. As for the integration of the remaining two ministries, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Agriculture, as well as of the seats of the Governor and the Deputy Governor and the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, OHR will closely coordinate this process and assist responsible officials in finding a final solution.

Deputy High Representative Berçot is aware of the significant effort and compromise needed in order to reach this agreement. He is thankful that a democratic consensus could be reached. Although there are still many issues to be settled, he considers this approach as a step in the right direction. It bears a concrete result and demonstrates that Cantonal officials are capable of changing over from an obstructive course to a constructive one in terms of fulfillment of their duties.

While fully welcoming this development, Deputy High Representative Berçot and OHR also expect a continuation along this encouraging path, especially in the sense of the Cantonal Ministries fully respecting and implementing what has been agreed upon in the Action Plan, without any further delays.

Secondly, a reminder concerning the tomorrow's meeting in Brussels. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the PIC Steering Board is meeting in Brussels on Thursday at the level of Political Directors. The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, will brief the Steering Board on the latest political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, among other things on developments regarding the reform of the Entity Constitutions. Other important items on the agenda will be the streamlining of the work of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as judiciary reform. As you know, the High Representative has been tasked by the Steering Board to finalise details of the proposal ahead of Thursday's meeting.

Thirdly, we would like to show you this a video clip about the property laws implementation. They will be distributed to TV and radio outlets soon, but today it is a premiere.

This spots especially refers to those who established their own families during the war and use that as an excuse to occupy someone else's property. This is definitely not legal fact and it cannot be accepted. That's all of behalf of the OHR.

As far as I know, Luka of OSCE does not have a specific statement for you today and I will then therefore give the floor to Sanja of UNHCR.

Sanja Alikalfic- UNHCR

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen on behalf of UNHCR. UNHCR has two brief statements today.

Tomorrow, on 28 February 2002, UNHCR Southern Office SBIH and its implementing partner PIU Housing will mark a completion of 2001 project "Provision of Quick Support Funds to Returnees in Southern BiH", the value of which was approx. 1,3 Mil KM. The work included 177 quick interventions, reconstruction of 26 housing units, 7 small scale projects for the repair of infrastructure facilities, 4 small scale re-equipping and/or small repairs of schools projects and provision of material for the repair of a building to be used as accommodation in the North Camp for elderly persons previously staying in container collective centers.

The ceremony will be held in Lokve and Bivolje Brdo in Capljina municipality, where some reconstructed housing units will be visited and representatives of Federation, Canton, Capljina municipality and UNHCR will have brief statements. Meeting point is at the cross-road of M17 and regional road to Buna at 10:45 hrs, media representatives are cordially invited to attend the ceremony. UNHCR is pleased to announce that the third container collective center, the South Camp on the territory of the municipality Mostar Old Town was officially closed last week. Out of 73 CC beneficiaries at the beginning of 2001, the majority repossessed their property or have had their houses reconstructed. Out of UNHCR caseload, five families without pre-war property have been moved into solid buildings CCs and 4 Roma families will remain in few containers in the South Camp until relevant authorities identify another location.

Avis Benes:

Thank you, Sanja. Let's give the floor to Major Lebrun.

Maj. Lebrun - MND SE

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, today I have one statement concerning SFOR exercise in MNDSE area from the 5th to 9th of March 2002. According to the Dayton Peace Agreement, in a time frame from March 5th to 9th, MNDSE troops will perform a military exercise at locations of Fojnice, Kiseljak, Hadzici, Kresevo and Bradina. The exercise goal is to test the readiness of SFOR troops for rapid reactions. During this exercise, the number of military vehicles will increase and it is possible that it will cause some traffic obstructions and jams. This traffic troubles may occur not only on the Federation side, location of the main part of MNDSE exercise, but also in the RS part of BiH due to the moving of some MNDSE units stationed there. We know that some people or some organisations of BiH consider this type of exercise as a provocation. They must know that it is a bad understanding of SFOR mission. MNDSE is performing this exercise in order to improve its ability to maintain the safety and the stability in BiH.

Questions

Q: Zdravko Puvaca (Studio 88): Ms. Avis, I have a very short question. Taking into consideration that we on the radio work on the issue of halt of illegal construction on the Apoteka site and dismissal of Mr. Pintul upon request of Mr. Tomic – I would like to ask you if you could give us a short explanation as to why has OHR taken such a decision and halted further construction works on that location?

A: Avis Benes: Let me rectify a few things that were obviously misunderstood in public. The OHR is not getting involved in the dismissals within the City Administration. This is the issue for the City Administration to resolve on its own, in a legal and normal manner and we are not participating in that process. Second of all, the OHR as such did not halt construction works, since the OHR does not have that competency. Mr. Bercot has addressed a letter to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, in which he stressed that there are certain doubts in terms of legality of the whole process and asked for construction works to be suspended until the full investigation is carried out. This was not an open letter, it was addressed to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and in that sense we expected the answers from them. Yesterday, we have received answer from Deputy Mayor Jahic, who expressed his consent that urban-construction inspector temporarily suspends the construction works until the completion of investigation. Namely, we expect these things to be materialized afterwards.

Q: Ivan Bakovic (HTV Mostar): Ms. Benes, what is your comment on yesterday's press announcement of the Association of Herzegovina Neretva Canton judges, claiming that three judges were detained by officers of the Ministry of Interior and questioned about the cases that they are currently in charge of. Don't you consider this to be a scandalous act as judiciary has to be independent in a legal state. A question for Major Lebrun – could you clarify who are the persons and organizations in BIH who consider your exercise as a provocation?

A: Avis Benes: Thank you for your question. I am really not familiar with the details of this case. In principle, we can all agree that judiciary must be independent and there must be no interference in its work whatsoever. Given that details of this case are not known, I can check with the competent OHR Department and contact you later.

A: Maj. Lebrun: For my question, I do not say more than I have said in my statement. But as you know if SFOR says that are some proofs of that I do not want to give more information about that because it is reality in this country that some people, hard-liners of each part, consider that all movements of SFOR troops are provocation. What I want to say about that – it is not true, and we are there to provide safe and secure environment, not to get any provocation to local people.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): I cannot resist from asking the following: since I have personally asked Mr. Tomic for some disputable construction works in the District, he told me that such questions are aimed at his dethroning. I am therefore surprised how come that he is now suddenly so interested in the illegal construction works taking into account that he was avoiding to deal with such hot issues until recently? What would be comment of the OHR on this? Thank you.

A: Avis Benes: As for the position of Mr. Tomic, that is something you have to ask him personally, not the OHR. The OHR position on the illegal construction is very clear – the OHR is against all such actions. We know that there is a great number of cases of illegal construction, but the OHR is not an organization that will deal with all individual cases. The City Administration and municipalities are the ones that have to implement the laws and prevent illegal construction by its actions. However, the fact is that, theoretically speaking, that one injustice cannot be justified by another.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): Another question – I have just spoken to the contractor, I do not wish to defend him in any way, but he showed me all valid documents for the construction. Secondly, Mayor Tomic himself stated at one of the press conferences that one should not insist on individual cases but resolve them systematically. I am therefore surprised as it seems that he is doing exactly the opposite, and it seems that he has full support of the International Community.

A: Avis Benes: When it comes to the validity of documents, I think it is not up to me or you to estimate. It is to be estimated throughout the investigation and that is what the OHR asked for. We do not give support to anyone individually we just support getting things cleared out.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): What about the support to the Mayor?

A: Avis Benes: I have just replied to it – we do not support anyone individually, we do support principled positions and behavior.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): A question for Luka. I would like you to help me in understanding a new strategic projection of security forces in Europe. You are probably aware that new European security forces of 60.000 members are to be formed, and they should probably replace SFOR in the Balkans. Taking into consideration that in the name of your organization there is “European security”, I would like to ask is your organization involved in this project? Also, could you tell us what kind of impact will this have on the situation in BiH? It is known that engagement of these forces in Macedonia is already being talked about. What will happen with BiH?

A: Ludvik Skoberne: It would be difficult for me to speculate as to what kind of role will the European peace forces have. However, I want to say that OSCE consists of 55 European countries and the main purpose of foundation of this organization in early 70es was to decrease the tensions in Europe. One of the important positions of the Helsinki Conference was that borders of the countries cannot be changed in a forcible manner. As far as our organization is concerned, we have Missions in 11 countries. The most numerous one is in BiH, with 860 staff members. As for the European interest for security and situation in BiH, I would like to mention recent decision of the European Union, saying that as of 1 January next year European police will replace IPTF. In any case, one can say that the interest of Europe for preservation of peace in this part of Europe is stressed and that it might be that this would be seen in the increase of number of soldiers from the European countries as well.

Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X): I am really glad to hear that the OHR started dealing with one of the greatest problems in the city – illegal construction works. Have you requested investigations in regards to other cases? If yes, have you received permission? Will you initiate discussion on cases that exists since the period of Carl Bildt? Is there a decision of the City Council about illegal construction works? Does the Federation Government building have a construction permit?

A: Avis Benes: OHR will surely not get involved in all individual cases of illegal construction. When it comes to the Central Zone, it is the responsibility of the City Administration. As for the municipalities, it is the responsibility of municipal officials. Yes, we expect from the City Administration to assume its responsibilities and duties and deal with this very sensitive issue. Of course, it is necessary that the City Administration function in a completely legal and lawful manner and jointly as well. In any case, we expect the City Administration to find a joint legal solution in accordance with what it proclaims.