

OHR Bulletin 41 - March 20, 1997

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The European Union recently announced the completion of three EU funded projects in Mostar.

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UNHCR will host an 'Expanded Regional Meeting of Refugee Ministers and Commissioners of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia' in Geneva on 20-21 March.

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Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers (CoM) met in Lukavica on 13 March for their 12th session. The meeting began with a presentation by Christine Wallich, Country Director for BiH at the World Bank (WB) HQ, who outlined WB plans to finance self-maintained projects and the establishment of governmental institutions and reforms in BiH. She expressed her hope that the CoM would become more cooperative and constructive with regard to the necessary laws which are preconditions for the Donor's Conference.

The CoM decided to sign an amendment on economic assistance from the US and ratify an agreement on economic cooperation with Libya. Also deliberated were technical issues such as relations between the different Ministries. Laws on Foreign Trade and Customs Policy were not agreed due to opposing opinions of CoM members on the establishing of special ties between the two Entities and neighbouring countries and the question of whether customs revenues would go to the State or the Entities.

The High Representative, Carl Bildt, sent a letter to the CoM on 13 March warning that further postponements of the Donor's Conference *"could have severe financial repercussions for the country"*. Though the CoM had been working for almost ten weeks, none of the necessary legislation had actually been finalised. Mr. Bildt strongly suggested that the CoM meet as often as necessary and prioritise its agenda items to allow for the urgent task of resolving outstanding IMF agreement issues. *"The financial commitment of the international community would risk being reduced in the case of failure to reach an agreement with the IMF; not least because increasing competition for financial aid in the region could result in a reduction of funds available to BiH,"* cautioned Mr. Bildt.

The CoM met again on 19 March in the National Museum, Sarajevo and discussed many items, five of which were the QSP Laws. The revised text of the Foreign Debt Law was agreed on, while the final text for the other laws still require further deliberation.

Federation

The fourth session of the Federation House of Representatives (HoR) and the third session of the House of Peoples (HoP) were held on 18 March.

House of Representatives: Vladimir Soljic and Ejup Ganic were elected President and Vice-President of the Federation, respectively. Mr. Soljic will hold the post of President from 31 December 1996 till 31 December 1997. From 31 December 1997 till 31 December 1998 they will exchange positions, Mr. Ganic being President and Mr. Soljic Vice President. It was decided that the mandate of the President would not exceed 31 December 1998. Prior to their election, Mr. Soljic and Mr. Ganic presented their programmes on their future work. Both expressed readiness for cooperation and equal treatment of all peoples, not just Bosniacs and Croats, as well as encouraging the efficient functioning of the Federation.

The HoR unanimously adopted the Rules of Procedure of the HoR as well as proposals for the President, Vice President and members of the Commission for Elections. Croat members of the Constitutional Court of BiH were elected: Mirko Zovko and Miljko Zvonko and the Deputy Minister of Health was also appointed: Ibrahim Ramic. Other proposed agenda items, including discussions on the continuation of ethnic expelling and safety of citizens of the Federation, were left to the next session.

House of Peoples: The HoP session approved the election of the Federation President and Vice-President. Hilmo Pasic was elected Secretary of the HoP. Discussion of the Rules of Procedure of the HoP was left until the next session.

The third session of the Federation Forum at working level was held at the US Embassy in Sarajevo on 13 March. The meeting was co-chaired by the OHR and the US Embassy. Issues on the agenda included implementation of the Protocol on the Organisation of Sarajevo, a report on the first meeting of the Special Group on Media Issues, status of the Federation Implementation Council, status of the Legislation on Forestry, Agriculture, Veterinary Services and Water Resources and status of the Cantonal Implementation of proposals by the Ministry of Education.

The second meeting of the Special Working Group on Media Issues met under the chairmanship of the OHR on 13 March. Discussion focused on the delegates views on the issues of media law. The EIM draft law was circulated and representatives were asked to consider this as a working foundation for establishing the new Federation media laws. It was decided that a sub-Working Group to take the form of a legal Commission would be formed to analyse the draft law in more detail, and that the Croat and Bosniac delegates would forward the nomination of candidates for this WG. It was also agreed that the Parties would look into the possibilities of creating an inventory detailing their current structure to be used as a baseline for assessing future organisation. The next meeting is scheduled for 27 March.

RS National Assembly

At the 5th session of the RS National Assembly on 15-16 March in Jahorina, the Law on Special and Parallel Relations between the RS and FRY which had been signed on 28 February was ratified. RS President Biljana Plavsic did not vote on the ratification and criticised the Agreement as being "*weak and incomplete*" and "*detrimental to the interests of the people*". At her request the Assembly ratified the Agreement without Article 14, which stipulates that the Agreement should be ratified by the BiH Parliamentary Assembly. The proposal that after ratification of the Agreement, the RS and FRY Assemblies should reconsider all points of Article 14, was adopted. Other Laws adopted included the Law on the City of Banja Luka and a Bill on the Territorial Organisation and Local Administration. The draft Budget and draft Law on Implementation of the RS Budget for 1997, as well as a draft Law on the RS Senate were also adopted.

Assembly delegates elected RS Supreme Court Judge Marko Arsovic, and Law Professor Vitomir Popovic as judges from RS for the Constitutional Court of BiH.

The Serbian Parliament at their session on 17 March also endorsed the RS/FRY Agreement and urged the Federal Parliament to ratify the accord.

HR Carl Bildt wrote to the Presidency of the European Union on the subject of the RS/FRY Agreement. Mr. Bildt said that because certain parts of the draft Agreement were clearly not in conformity with the division of responsibilities between the Entities and the common institutions he was calling upon the EU to support the requirement that the Agreement be brought into line with the Constitution of BiH and to advise Belgrade accordingly.

Right to Return

UN IPTF Commissioner Manfred Seitner informed the RS on 13 March that IPTF would launch its own investigation into a recent incident in Gajevi, where prefabricated houses built for the return of Bosniac refugees were recently burned down. UN officials described the RS investigation into the incident as "*both tardy and inadequate*" and said there would also be investigations into allegations of local police involvement in the attacks. The investigation is expected to take several weeks, during which time the UN expects full cooperation from the RS authorities

Human Rights

An explosive device badly damaged a mosque in the village of Stipanici, 8 km from Tomislavgrad, on 15 March. International human rights monitors have also recently received a number of complaints from Bosniaks in the area who say that the Tomislavgrad authorities have tried to expropriate privately-owned farm land from them for municipal use. International organisations are following up on both of these matters.

The then Federation President Kresimir Zubak issued a press release deploring the destruction of the mosque and stressing that the act was contrary to the principles of Croat policy in BiH and the Federation. Adding that the attack was aimed at breaking all efforts to normalise relations between Croats and Bosniacs, as well as endeavours to establish peace and coexistence in BiH, Mr. Zubak called on the police to undertake a thorough investigation and punish the perpetrators.

The UN Special Rapporteur is scheduled to visit BiH from 21-28 March. In the course of her mission she will meet with representatives of the International Community, such as the new Special Representative of the Secretary General, Ambassador Kai Eide, as well as with representatives of the authorities of both Entities. Beyond this she will undertake a joint mission with the Federation Ombudsmen to the area of Mostar, Stolac and Capljina. Further visits to Jablanica, Prozor, Gorazde and Pale are also planned.

Mostar

The OHR South office released a statement on 15 March explaining that “because of a speech made by Mr. Mijo Brajkovic, General Director of the [aluminium] plant, in which he insulted the European Union and specifically the former EU Administrator, Mr. Hans Koschnick, in front of President Tudjman, President Zubak, Prime Minister Matesa, Minister Susak, Mayor Prskalo and many more Croatian and Croat dignitaries of the highest standing”, the Head of the OHR South, Sir Martin Garrod, and Head of the OSCE Regional Centre, Mr. Edward Joseph had walked out of the opening ceremony of the Mostar aluminium plant that morning.

In a letter to Croatian President Dr. Franjo Tudjman, the Principal Deputy High Representative, Ambassador Michael Steiner, expressed grave concern over the incident. In his speech Mr. Brajkovic had *“in effect condoned the mob attack against the EU Administrator Koschnick – an attack which was condemned by the entire international community, including the Republic of Croatia”*, said Ambassador Steiner. Supporting the actions of Sir Martin, Ambassador Steiner said, *“We should continue to undertake all efforts to prevent unwarranted and destructive statements by Federation officials, in particular, at a time when we are working in close cooperation with your Government to make the Federation fully function”*.

ICRC

The ICRC announced on that on 25 March it would be entering the third phase of its campaign to find missing persons. The campaign aims to encourage eyewitnesses to testify to disappearances they may have witnessed and to provide information on missing persons. So far the ICRC have collected 18,500 search requests and only 1,000 people have been found. The ICRC stressed that the families of missing persons had a right to know the truth about what had happened to their loved ones and that all information obtained would be strictly confidential.

World Bank

A World Bank (WB) delegation led by Christine Wallich, Country Director for BiH at the WB HQ visited BiH from 10-18 March to begin discussions on the development of the *“Country Assistance Strategy”* that will define the World Bank strategy and programme of support for BiH over the next two to three years. The delegation met with government authorities and others in BiH to hear views on the key building blocks of this programme. The WB outlined its future vision of BiH as one which envisages *“a peaceful Bosnia with a dynamic, market-oriented economy, linked through trade to the broader European region, with growth generated by a private sector led economic recovery that provides jobs, restores domestic incomes, and leads to creditworthiness and reduced dependence on international aid flows”*. Three objectives which the WB believes to be of particular importance in achieving these aims are: a sustaining of reconstruction efforts; a strengthening of institutions; and a transition to a modern market economy. In contrast to the *“front loading”* of WB support worth US\$ 360 million in 1996, the 1997-1999 period would be more constrained and selective maintaining an optimum balance between this continued presence in the reconstruction of the physical and social infrastructure, while maximising the ability to provide budgetary support that many other donors are unable to provide – providing policy performance of the BiH authorities justified this support.

European Union

The European Union recently announced the completion of three EU funded projects in Mostar:

- **Rudnik Transformer Station (3 million DEM)**

The reconstruction of the Rudnik Transformer Station with a capacity of 20 megawatts allowed the capacity of the old station to be increased by up to 50%.

- **Brankovac Health Centre for Mother and Child (5 million DEM)**

The Health Centre was reconstructed and extended. EU funding included the supply of modern medical and laboratory equipment.

- **Mostar Puppet Theatre (1.4 million DEM)**

Designed to be a multi-functional centre capable of handling scientific seminars, musical performances, film shows and other cultural events the reconstruction of the puppet theatre included the supply of modern technical equipment.

Refugee and Humanitarian Affairs

UNHCR will host an 'Expanded Regional Meeting of Refugee Ministers and Commissioners of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia' in Geneva on 20-21 March. Peter Maher, co-chairman of the Reconstruction and Return Task Force (RRTF), OHR Economics Department, will brief international organisations and representatives of the refugee/DP Ministries of BiH and its neighbouring countries, as well as of the main European host countries on the status of the RRTF consultations.

Albania

In light of the current situation in Albania the High Representative, Carl Bildt, released a [statement](#) on 15 March urging the governments of Europe to "wake up to the realities of South -Eastern Europe and start to devise the long term policies for stability which will be necessary". In view of the chaos in Albania and the recent major crises in Serbia and Bulgaria, as well as the likelihood that there would be further turmoil and crisis in these countries, Mr. Bildt warned that "theoretical discussions on common foreign and security policy risk[ed] looking pathetic if the European Union [was] not able to pursue strong policies in the area of Europe where instability [was] most dangerous." A limited military operation in Albania seemed essential, said Bildt, in order to demonstrate Europe's resolve in dealing with instability and security threats, as well as to assist with providing humanitarian aid and assistance for the elections which must come. It would also send a signal to other parts of the region that Europe would deal more decisively with potential threats to stability than was the case in the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis. The pattern of instability in Europe south of Slovenia could no longer be overlooked. Close co-operation with the US would of course be vital but it was important that Europe did not fail again, said Mr. Bildt.

Looking Ahead

21-28 March

UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, Elisabeth Rehn, visits BiH.

2 April

Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council meet in Istanbul

12-13 April

Scheduled visit to Sarajevo by Pope John Paul II

See our [Chronology](#) for a full list of activities

The OHR Bulletin is produced by the Public Affairs Department of the Office of the High Representative in Sarajevo and aims to give an overview of what is happening on the ground in the civilian implementation of the Dayton Agreement.

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