

# **OHR Bulletin 38 - February 26, 1997**

No. 38, issued February 26, 1997

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## **Mostar**

The United Nations International Police Task Force (UN IPTF) released their report in pursuance of the 12 February Decisions on Mostar, in which the IPTF Special Investigation Group established in full the facts related to the serious incident which occurred in Mostar on 10 February, when West Mostar police tried to prevent a group of Bosniacs from visiting a graveyard on the Islamic religious holiday of Bajram. The ensuing violence resulted in the death of one person and wounding of at least 20 others.

The report, presented on 24 February to the Principals at the Office of the High Representative, outlined twelve key findings regarding the events, which were:

- West Mostar police officers fired their weapons at the crowd as it was retreating from the scene, killing one person and injuring twenty others.
- Uniformed and plainclothes members of the West Mostar police physically assaulted the Bosniac procession members.
- The West Mostar police used excessive force, including unjustified lethal force, against the Bosniac marchers.
- The West Mostar police, and its leadership, are responsible for the confrontation with the Bosniac marchers which resulted in violence.
- West Mostar police officials attempted to cover up actions of their officers, and created confusion among the public as to what actually occurred.
- The West Mostar police had been informed in advance of the Bosniac march to the cemetery.
- The general character of the procession was peaceful, even after the West Mostar police attempted to stop the cemetery visit.
- There was no contact or confrontation between the Bosniac marchers and the Carnival attendees.
- There is no evidence that members of the Bosniac procession carried weapons, or that they

acted aggressively before the West Mostar police fired on them.

- An IPTF monitor made a gesture which was interpreted as encouragement for the Bosniac procession to move forward.
- The West Mostar police attempted to cover up the facts concerning the events of the 10 February 1997, with support from the highest level of the force.
- There were numerous attacks on civilians, both Bosnian Croat and Bosniac, in the aftermath of the event at the cemetery. Police took little action to arrest the perpetrators or to protect innocent persons who were attacked.

Principal Deputy High Representative, Ambassador Michael Steiner, wrote to Alija Izetbegovic, Chair of the BiH Presidency, and Kresimir Zubak, Presidency Member, on 24 February informing them of the IPTF findings. In his letter, Ambassador Steiner outlined the necessary actions to be taken in order *“to demonstrate to the citizens of this country that crimes do not go unpunished”*. These included the immediate implementation in full of the of the 12 February Agreement, which demanded, among other things, the dismissal from office, arrest and prosecution of those found to be involved in the violence and the recommendation to the EU Governments and Steering Board members to bar those who had been identified in the report as perpetrators of the violence from travelling to Europe and overseas.

Ambassador Steiner said that the 10 February shooting was inexcusable but could not be seen in a political vacuum. He warned that the political performance of the Mostar Mayor and his Deputy, and their efforts to put an end to inflammatory statements would be monitored closely. *“I will not hesitate to request your intervention and action of the EU Governments regarding travel restrictions against any politician in the Herzegovina Neretva Canton who continues to pour oil into the flames”*, said Steiner. Ambassador Steiner also requested that the issue of policing in the area be addressed, in light of the performance of the Mostar police on both sides to prevent further incidents of assault following the 10 February violence.

In concluding, Ambassador Steiner called for *“more radical efforts [to] be undertaken to achieve a turning point in the relations between the peoples of the Federation and their leaders”*. In particular, Ambassador Steiner called for a personal commitment to the speedy implementation of the Sarajevo Protocol, the adoption of a first Law on Municipal Reforms, and further progress in the building of Mostar institutions. In addition, the Federation’s approach to the media, as well as the return of refugees and DPs had to be addressed. *“It is unacceptable that three years after the conclusion of the Washington and Vienna Agreements, return to minority areas within the Federation has not really started”*, he said.

A number of security-related incidents were reported in Mostar during the past week, including an attack on 21 February on two Spanish APCs. The rocket launched explosives resulted in damage to one vehicle, with no injuries. SFOR increased its presence following the attack and Commander of MND South East, Major General Yves Le Chatelier, joined the international community in condemning the *“deplorable act of terrorism”*. *“SFOR’s mandate is clear and we will not be deterred from our mission. I have 10,000 men under my command, and I will do what is necessary to remove all forces that threaten us”*, he warned. This is the first time SFOR personnel have been directly targeted since the beginning of their mandate. An investigation is ongoing with the support of IPTF. Following this incident there were further reports of explosions later in the week, as well as new cases of alleged harassment.

## Presidency Meeting

The fifteenth session of the Presidency of BiH was held at the National Museum in Sarjevo on 25 February. At the meeting the Presidency formed the Organisation Board for the visit of Pope John Paul II, who is scheduled to visit BiH on 13 April. The Presidency also adopted a platform for the visit of a delegation from BiH to Great Britain. The delegation will be headed by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jadranko Prlic, who is authorised to sign an agreement on economic cooperation. The Presidency authorised the Co-Chairmen of the Council of Ministers – Haris Silajdzic and Boro Botic, Vice-Chair Neven Tomic, Minister Jadranko prlic and his deputies, to prepare a proposal for the distribution and organisation of the diplomatic and consular network of BiH, as well as for the nomination of new representatives of BiH in the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Following its session, the Presidency received the Swedish Prime Minister, Goran Persson, who is paying a two day visit to BiH.

## **Council of Ministers**

The Rules of Procedure, agreed in principle at last week's Council of Ministers (CoM) session, were finally signed on 20 February at their session in Sarajevo. Council Co-Chairman, Haris Silajdzic, expressed his gratitude to the High Representative, Carl Bildt, who had also attended the session, and members of his office, for their constructive contribution to the drafting of the protocol. The draft law on privatisation, restitution and property issues was also discussed, but significant differences remain regarding whether these matters should be decided at the State or Entity level. Further progress was made on the "Quick Start Package" of laws, although significant differences still exist between CoM members, particularly on issues of the budget, customs, and foreign debt. Ministers were asked to finalise their work on the laws, and present reports outlining outstanding differences to the Council at its next session. The Council also discussed preparations for the forthcoming visit of Pope John II to Sarajevo, planned for April. The next CoM session is scheduled for 27 February.

## **Refugees**

A UNHCR statement released on 21 February expressed alarm at the "unhelpful and in fact, irresponsible statements" made recently by some Serb leaders who predict a "mass exodus" from the Eastern Slavonia region. UNHCR said that such predictions were designed to sow fear among the region's Serb population and could have a self-fulfilling prophecy. The statement cautioned that there was nowhere for these people to go and that those who were trying to "push their own people to a life of misery" knew this perfectly well: "Yugoslavia with hundreds of thousands of refugees is not an option, neither is Republika Srpska, where displaced people often live in dismal conditions crammed into overfilled collective centres". UNHCR warned that Eastern Slavonia Serbs would be "ill advised" to listen to those who were trying to instigate such an exodus.

## **Coalition for Return**

On 22-23 February, 270 members of the Coalition for Return met in Tuzla to discuss ways to prepare for return. In five working groups, with topics ranging from public information issues to self-help projects and contacts with authorities, the participants planned a programme of Coalition activities for the spring. Among the main conclusions was the importance of providing accurate information to displaced persons, refugees and host countries. The Coalition also called on displaced persons and refugees to participate in the forthcoming municipal elections by voting for candidates who have proved by deeds their commitment to return. The Coalition is seeking funds to establish an information network and to build roofs in towns and villages where people wish to live together again.

## **Federation**

The Federation Forum held a working level session in Sarajevo on 20 February. At the meeting it was agreed that the unified police of the Sarajevo Canton would be established on 26 February and a ceremony to mark the occasion would be held on that date. The session, which was co-chaired by representatives from the OHR and the US Embassy, also discussed implementation of the Protocol on the Organisation of Sarajevo, the work of the Commission on Municipalities, the preparation and passage of essential legislation and the housing and office needs of the Federation officials. In addition, the Parties nominated their representatives for the Special Group on Media Issues.

Following negotiations mediated by Mr. James Pardew, US Special Envoy for Military Stabilisation in the Balkans, Chairman of the Presidency of BiH, Alija Izetbegovic, and member of the Presidency and President of the BiH

Federation, Kresimir Zubak, signed an agreement approving the appointment of senior posts in the Ministry of Defence of the BiH Federation. Federal Defence Minister, Ante Jelavic, and his Deputy, Sakib Mahmuljin, also signed the agreement. In his statement following the meeting, Mr. Pardew said that an agreement was also reached on a request for donor funding for the purchase of air defence systems, additional armoured personnel carriers and artillery for the Federation Armed Forces. He said purchases would be competitive and negotiations would begin immediately with countries interested in the sales of those systems. Although an agreement on the national composition of the Federal Army failed to be reached, Mr. Pardew said that "discussions on this subject [would] continue and should not interfere with forward progress of the Train and Equip programme". The Bosniacs accept the US proposal of a 2.5:1 ratio of Bosniacs to Croats in the Federation Army, which the Croats have thus far resisted.

## **PIC Steering Board**

The High Representative, Carl Bildt, attended a meeting of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council on 19 February. The meeting focused mainly on police issues, staffing and financial details as well as the implementation strategy for Brcko, including the requirements for an early start to the work of the Brcko Supervisor who is yet to be appointed. Mr. Bildt also briefed the North Atlantic Council where the subject of Brcko and measures to implement the arbitors decision were discussed.

## **Republica Srpska**

The RS Government session held in Pale on 20 February focused on the draft budget for 1997. Debate on the subject centred mainly on budget funding and new modalities and criteria for its distribution. The Government appointed an Inter-Ministerial Commission to coordinate work between the Ministries and further elaborate on the proposed draft. A final version of the draft is expected to be ready for the next Government session.

## **Freedom of Movement**

Senior BiH Federal officials signed an agreement on 21 February to undertake decisive measures against members of the Federal Army who deprive federal citizens of the right to freedom of movement. The agreement was signed by Federal Defence Minister Ante Jelavic, his Deputy, Sakib Mahmuljin, the Commander of the Federal Army, Rasim Delic and his Deputy Zivko Budimir.

## **Media Issues**

The first Inter-Entity Journalists Conference of 1997 took place in Sarajevo on 21-22 February in Sarajevo. This is a continuation of the local and regional Inter-Entity Journalists Meetings initiated by the OSCE in January 1996. The seminars are organised with an aim to: further re-establish contacts and cooperation among journalist throughout the country; encourage an exchange of information and movement of journalists across the Inter-Entity Boundary Line; and provide the framework for an open and constructive discussion on media issues.

The seminar, hosted by OSCE, was attended by presidents of independent journalists associations from both Entities of BiH and included a presentation of independent media from the RS; current activities of the Media Experts Commission; and a presentation by UN IPTF on the harassment of journalists which included recent incidents and security concerns.

## Economic Assistance

The High Representative (HR), Carl Bildt, announced on 18 February changes in the economic department of the OHR in Sarajevo following the strengthening of the role of the OHR in that area as decided at the London Conference. The new Deputy HR for Economic Issues is Mr. Claude Ganz, who replaces Mr. Dick Sklar as Special Representative of the US President and Secretary of State, and is being seconded to the HR. Mr. Ganz brings to the OHR his considerable expertise from a distinguished background in private US business. The Economic Unit has also been strengthened with representatives of the European Commission and the World Bank, in order to ensure better coordination of the overall effort through the Economic Task Force.

Mr. Bildt took the opportunity to express his high appreciation for the work Mr. Sklar had done. "The close cooperation we have had has been of great importance in shaping this improved mechanism for coordinating the economic assistance and economic reform efforts", he said.

## Open Broadcast Network

The Governing Council of the Open Broadcast Network (obn) met in Brussels on 25 February to discuss plans for Stage 2 of the network development. Following presentations on the programming, technical and business aspects of the development plan, international donors pledged the funds necessary to cover the US\$ 7.4 million investment recommended by the Project Assistance Team (PAT) for the network's 2 year consolidation phase.

Pledges included US\$ 2 million from the European Commission, at least US\$ 1.1 million from the US and US\$ 1 million from the Open Society Institute (SOROS), as well as substantive contributions from Stage 1 donors including Japan, Germany, UK, Canada, Luxembourg and Ireland. New donors included Denmark, Norway and the OSCE. Disbursement of many of these pledges will be subject to the satisfactory development of the network, and some of them await final political approval.

Donors were encouraged by the findings of an independent survey commissioned by the OSCE which revealed that the TV-INFO news programme already reached at least 27% of the Federation audience, with over 46% viewers watching regularly in Tuzla. The weakest audiences for the OBN programming were in RS where a Stage 2 envisages the creation of a new network affiliate, ATV, based in Banja Luka; and in Sarajevo, where only the TV-INFO news can currently be seen from the OBN programming, arrangements will be made in the weeks ahead for the full OBN/TV-IN programming to be shown there.

Michael Maclay, Chairman of the Governing Council and Special Advisor to HR Carl Bildt, welcomed the pledges for Stage 2 which were made at the meeting. *"These generous pledges give the green light for Stage 2 and make clear that the OBN is here to stay. Much work remains to be done on programming and on transmission arrangements, particularly in Sarajevo and in the RS. But this is an excellent start"*, he said.

## Looking Ahead

### 26 February

Fourth Meeting of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, Banja Luka

### 27 February

8th Council of Ministers Session, Lukavica

### 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*

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