

Statement of the Contact Group, Moscow, 25/2/1998

Contact Group Meeting

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1. The Contact Group at its meeting in Moscow on February 25, 1998, reviewed the progress of implementation of the Peace Agreement based on the information provided by the High Representative.

The Contact group endorsed the steps taken by the High Representative to accelerate the peace process pursuant to the authority given him by the Dayton Accords and the Bonn PIC conference. The Contact Group, however, emphasized that the actions of the High Representative do not in any way relieve the Bosnian sides of their responsibility and the need to take decisions on their own.

The Contact Group underscored its view that the common institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina need to become increasingly effective. In this connection it is necessary to solve the issue of permanent premises for the common institutions. The Contact Group reiterated its impartial approach to all Bosnian sides and called on them to fully implement the Dayton Accords, and confirmed that support for the various sides would be influenced by the extent to which they do so.

The Contact Group endorsed the High Representative's assessment that full OSCE supervision of the round of elections in BiH scheduled for September 1998 would be necessary. The Contact Group underlined the need to expedite elaboration of the Electoral Law and the establishment on its basis of the Permanent Election Commission.

The Contact Group welcomed the positive developments in the Republika Srpska since the formation of the new Government. It expressed strong support for its constructive policy in implementing the Peace Agreement. The Contact Group particularly appreciated Prime Minister Dodik's decision to restart transport and communication links with the Federation, and steps to end corruption and implement fiscal and economic reforms.

The Contact Group also welcomed Prime Minister Dodik's decision to allow the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to open an office in the Republika Srpska, and the decision of three residents of the RS to voluntarily surrender to the Tribunal's custody. It urged other indictees to do likewise, and reiterated that all signatories to the Dayton Accords, and all States, have an obligation to cooperate with the Tribunal.

Taking note of positive shifts in reform of the radio and TV in the Republika Srpska, the Contact Group expects that the international community shall intensify efforts as well as in the Federation, in order to make the BiH media fully comply with European democratic standards.

The Contact Group reiterated the necessity of full implementation of the municipal election results, dismantling of illegal parallel structures and ensuring freedom of movement.

The Contact group emphasized the 1998 must bring decisive steps to achieve the return of refugees and displaced persons to their places of origin. The Contact Group supported the activities of the UNHCR in cooperation with the Return and Reconstruction Task Force and other International Agencies. It called on all States in the region to cooperate in an all-way programme of returns, and focused in particular on the need for freedom of return throughout Croatia. It highlighted the necessity of preventing provocations or discrimination against returning refugees and displaced persons.

The Contact Group stressed the need to implement fully the results of the February 3 Conference on Return to Sarajevo, which was an important step in implementing the Bonn PIC Conclusions on the return of

refugees to minority areas.

The Contact Group expressed satisfaction with the decision of the Republika Srpska National Assembly to annul the Property Law which did not correspond to the spirit and letter of Annex 7 to the Peace Agreement. The Contact Group calls upon the Federation of BiH to bring, without delay, its property and housing legislation fully in line with the proposals of the High Representative.

The Contact Group recalled the importance of an early IMF agreement, and regretted that this was being blocked by one party. The Contact Group called on those concerned to resolve their difficulties by the time the IMF Mission returns to BiH.

2. The Contact Group reviewed the situation in the Brcko area, in the expectation that an arbitral decision will be issued on March 15. In this context, the Contact Group called upon all parties to cooperate in a constructive fashion with the international supervisor and to respect the decision.
3. The Contact Group reminded all parties to the Dayton Agreement of their fundamental obligation to promote, in word and action, national reconciliation. In that context, the Contact Group expressed concern regarding President Tudjman's February 20 speech to the HDZ Congress. The Contact Group also expressed concern about recent acts of intimidation and violence against Croatian Serbs in Eastern Slavonia, and called on the Government of Croatia to take the necessary steps to meet its obligations fully under the Erdut Agreement and the Letter of Intent of January 13, 1997.

Office of the High Representative