

Transcript of the High Representative's Press Conference following Meeting with Mostar Officials

The High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling:

Thank you for coming here today.

We have just had a constructive discussion. We have reviewed progress since our last meeting; we've set out future targets; and we've discussed recent violent incidents in Mostar.

When we met on 25 May, I set out three items on which substantial progress needed to have been achieved by 20 June, before the meeting of the Peace Implementation Council.

These were the City budget, the systemization of the City administration, and the establishment of a single public utility company.

The budget was adopted on 29 May. However, it was linked to the task of harmonising the HTV, the cultural institutions and the public kitchens, to bring them in line with the Statute.

On 21 June, the City Council adopted the systemization plan, allowing for the opening of a number of external Civil Service vacancies. Since there is still a conflict over the issue of the Urban Planning Institution, it was also decided that the vacancies planned for the Urban Planning Department would be suspended until that conflict is resolved.

While I'm pleased that a temporary solution has been found, I

am concerned that the conflict itself has not been resolved.

Also on 21 June, the City Council adopted the plan for dealing with surplus workers. My concern is that the plan relies on World Bank credits that have yet to be approved by the Federation Parliament.

Certain effort has been put into the public utility companies. However, there has not been sufficient progress towards the establishment of a single public utility company.

After our discussions today expect the following:

- Firstly, an immediate announcement of the 35 undisputed civil service vacancies in cooperation with the Civil Service Agency, and decisions according to the timeline stipulated in the law.
- Secondly, a timeline for the downsizing of surplus workers.
- And thirdly, a plan of action concerning the establishment of a single public utility company.

I expect the information on points 1 and 2 to be delivered to our office in Mostar not later than 11 July. Each item should also be acknowledged in the City Council.

We agreed that information on point 3 would be presented by 31 July.

I also expect a progress report on the harmonisation of the statutes of HTV, the cultural institutions, and the public kitchens, by the deadline that the City Council set for itself, namely 1 August. After that, we will set a date for another meeting.

I'm sure that meeting will happen; I am very satisfied that we are talking now in a constructive atmosphere.

I am also encouraged that the City Council unanimously condemned violence in and around Mostar in recent weeks,

including the riot following the Brazil-Croatia football match, the assault on the Imam in Balinovac, and the recent incident in Potoci.

The City Council's reaction was responsible and I urge all Mostar political and religious leaders to take a stance on this issue and categorically condemn all violence.

Given Mostar's past it is incumbent on all religious and political leaders to be clear that this is not Mostar's future. A change in people's consciousness will come, but Political and Religious leaders must make clear public statements to underline that this is not acceptable.

The Mayor of Mostar, Ljubo Bešlić:

First, I have to say that Mostar is now known for the many incidents that have occurred in the city in the past, however I firmly believe that Mostar will find the strength to come up with a new, positive approach. We have proven, in a very short period of time, that Mostar has the strength to improve the situation in the city, the situation can get better, and we can work together in the best interest of the people of Mostar.

As the High Representative said earlier, we came here today to discuss several items set out during our last meeting. We informed the High Representative that we have made substantial progress regarding those items and that we will be carrying out specific reforms in the city – in accordance with the decisions made by the City Council – by the end of this year. This applies to the issue of the Civil Service vacancies and the issue of the downsizing of surplus workers. Concerning the public utility company, I have to say that we have made progress and that we are close to resolving the issue of registering a landfill site for the disposal of solid waste

under the name «Uborak Mostar». We will take this strategic decision by the end of this month. I believe that we will find the proper solution to these problems.

I must also emphasize that we also discussed the current safety situation in the city of Mostar and that we were all, indeed, in agreement that the situation in Mostar must be stabilised and that we condemn all of the incidents that have occurred in Mostar. We also ask that the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Judiciary, especially the Prosecutor's Office, undertake stronger measures so that the offenders are duly punished and others, who might share that way of thinking, are discouraged from doing the same.

I hope that the positive atmosphere here today will be carried on in the work of the City Council and I believe that the atmosphere during our next meeting will be just as good. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the High Representative and International Community for taking an interest in the situation in Mostar. I believe that we have enough strength – of course with a little help from the International Community – to make great progress. Thank you very much.

RTQs:

Dragan Simović, News Agency SRNA:

A question for both the High Representative and the Mayor of Mostar. Are you satisfied with the level of return of citizens who lived in Mostar before the war and who are neither Croat nor Bosniac?

The High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling:

Is this a question for the Mayor?

Dragan Simović, News Agency SRNA:

Well, since the Mayor was speaking he can answer this question also. So, how many Serbs are employed in the City Administration and how many Serb returnees are there in Mostar?

I have one more question – about sport...What is going on with the sports stadium «Bijeli Brijeg», when will this issue be resolved?

The Mayor of Mostar, Ljubo Bešlić:

Regarding the return of Serbs to Mostar I have to say that personally I am satisfied with the recent level of return of Serbs to Mostar. We estimate that around 7500 Serbs are living in Mostar now. A year ago that figure was around 4500, therefore I think the situation now is quite good.

With regard employment in the City Administration: During our meeting today we discussed the possibility of employing a certain number of Serbs in the Civil Service in order to improve ethnic balance and I believe that we will better the situation with the help of the Federation Civil Service Agency. I am not saying that the situation will become ideal, but I think that Mostar surpasses all of the other cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of multi ethnicity in the City Administration. I believe that the City Administration of Mostar has the most multiethnic structure as far as higher level positions are concerned and I believe that we will now also improve the ethnic balance for lower level positions as well.

Regarding the issue of the sports stadium «Bijeli Brijeg» – we are discussing it and I think we are heading in the right direction. However, certain contracts and obligations exist, and we are looking for a way to come up with a solution for these matters.

Mostar City Council President, Murat Coric:

As an official of the City Council of Mostar I would like to say that the recent positive initiatives and positive atmosphere in the City Council will certainly prevail in the future. In contrast to several earlier meetings, the Council has now demonstrated that it is responsible and completely dedicated to passing decisions that are in the best interest of all of the citizens of Mostar and, by doing so, contributing to the progress of the city as a whole.

Concerning the deadlines that have been set today, the Council will most definitely work in accordance with the suggestions that we receive from the Mayor's Office and in doing so will meet the deadlines the Council itself has set regarding the items we discussed here today.

I would also like to emphasize the responsibility of the other levels of government, especially with regards to the safety situation in the city. They have to do their part of the work, and the City Council will, by holding a special meeting that has been confirmed here today, analyse the overall situation in the city, determine the measures it must undertake and the responsibilities of those who must do everything they can in order to prevent any excessive behaviour or unwanted incidents from occurring in the city of Mostar. By doing so we hope to contribute to improving the quality of the tourist season in Mostar, as well as bettering the overall relations between the people in the city.

The High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling:

Thank you very much. I think that we should now let them go back to Mostar because they also want to see the football match. I think I should not be the one to stop them from watching the Germany v's. Italy game. So, thank you very much.