Transcript of the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference

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OHR

Crucial Debate in Parliament Today

Today is a crucial day for Bosnia and Herzegovina . This country's elected representative are, for the first time, discussing changes to the Dayton Constitution – a document which, when it was drafted and agreed, represented the only compromise possible to end four years of bloody war.

The very fact that BiH's elected representatives are able to discuss changes to that document is a sign of progress. It is hard to imagine such a debate taking place several years ago.

After months of negotiations, the Bosnian political leaders reached an agreement on a package of measures that reform the constitution. It is now up to the BiH House of Representatives to take the necessary decisions on this package today.

The proposed changes are an important step towards strengthening the State structures. They will help equip BiH better for EU integration which requires quick and effective adoption and implementation of a large number of laws. BiH also needs more effective and efficient government in order to increase the peace of the reforms.

Reflecting the importance of this debate the Principal Deputy High Representative, Larry Butler, will be in Parliament today – as an observer, not a participant. The International Community has given its support to this process but ultimately it is the people of BiH through their elected representatives that must decide. This increasingly reflects the new ownership relationship between the domestic authorities and the International Community.

The EU Special Representative and High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling will also highlight the importance of this reform when he addresses the EU's Political and Security Committee and the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee today. The High Representative is optimistic that there will be progress today.

EUFOR

No statement.

RTQs

Journalist:

Comment on EUFOR operation in Cajnice?

EUFOR:

I can tell you that there was an operation last night. It has not been completed. It was completed this morning about six o'clock this morning. It was done in Cajnice.

Nedim Dervisbegovic, Reuters

Question not recorded.

EUFOR:

Well, the mandate for EUFOR is – well, a part of that is always to help and cooperate with the ICTY in search of PIFWICs. So that is always one of the mandates that we are looking at when we are doing any sort of operation.

Nedim Dervisbegovic, Reuters

Can you tell us if there was a case this time and how successful you were?

EUFOR:

I cannot tell you any of the details about the operation, I'm afraid.

Nedim Dervisbegovic, Reuters

I have another question if you do not mind. Last week there was another report, pretty unsubstantiated, alleging that the Al-Qaida is using the Balkans as a springboard for Western Europe. It goes on to repeat many earlier claims, which NATO denied, that Al-Qaida is present in Bosnia and is using Bosnia as a terrorist training base and so on. Do you still stand by your earlier claims that there is no evidence of Al-Qaida presence in Bosnia ? Has something changed here in the meantime?

EUFOR:

Yes. Nothing has changed. There are always these rumours that come out on a regular basis. We have had no indication that the Balkans are in any way more of a threat then any other country in Europe or the rest of the world. We are here to help the Balkans set up a safe and secure environment and that is part of fighting organised crime, fighting all the internal problems that any state has, not just for the Balkans. But we have had no evidence that it is a greater place or a worse place then any other state for a springboard for international crime.

Nedim Dervisbegovic, Reuters

Just for the record, do you have any evidence of Al-Qaida presence and activities or Al-Qaida related activities in the Balkans and in Bosnia in particular?

EUFOR:

I obviously cannot comment on particular intelligence that we have, for obvious reasons. But, I can say that nothing has changed as far as we are aware with regards to the reports that have recently come out in the press.