

Transcript of the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference

OHR, Oleg Milisic

OSCE, Mersiha Causevic-Podzic

EUFOR, Jem Thomas

OHR

High Representative Lobbies for BiH

The High Representative is in London today where he will meet with the UK's Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. As you know the UK currently holds the rotating Presidency of the EU. The Presidency will play a key role in the start of BiH's SAA negotiations.

The High Representative will brief the Foreign Secretary on the progress that BiH has made which has enabled the EC to recommend to EU Member States to open negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with BiH. The High Representative will underline that BiH has decisively embarked on the path that leads to Europe, and that there has been a decisive shift away from the country's postwar reality.

In many ways the hard technical work lies ahead; appointing effective leadership for the negotiations process is essential. This is a task for the domestic institutions. European integration is a question of such importance for BiH that it should be treated as a project for the whole of BiH; it should be above issues of a party-political, Entity or ethnic nature.

BiH leaders will want to ensure that the State Institutions, which are to lead this process, are made more functional. BiH must ensure that as a State it puts the interests of the citizens first. This means reducing the cost of government, eliminating the duplication of services and bringing civil service salaries into line with the country's capacity to pay. This is again for the BiH authorities themselves to decide upon, but a functional state is essential if BiH is to make further progress on the European road.

Thirdly, the High Representative will say that there is still much work for the leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to do; it is not enough simply to agree to reforms, those reforms must be legislated and implemented effectively if BiH's citizens are to experience the real benefits of closer association with the EU.

The High Representative will emphasise that the EU has effective methods of ensuring that progress continues. Bosnia and Herzegovina will need to stick to the implementation timelines it has set itself; on police reform this means making the Directorate for the Implementation of the Police Restructuring operational by 31 December. The PBS Service Law must be adopted by the BiH HoP.

The High Representative will also point out that once the SAA process is underway it will be possible to begin phasing out the use of the Bonn Powers and the OHR as a whole. Provided that the necessary progress is made, by the October 2006 elections there is a firm hope that the OHR will have been replaced by an EU led Mission and that the Bonn powers have been gotten rid of.

We hope that photographs of this meeting will be available this afternoon and we will be distributing them to you.

OSCE

No statement.

EUFOR

In between 25 and 28 October elements of MNTF SE, in support of local law enforcement agencies, will be conducting Operation PADLOCK, aimed at countering a range of illegal activities through the establishment of several Vehicle Check Points (VCPs). Some of these check points may cause traffic delays on some of the main routes into Sarajevo . EUFOR regrets any inconvenience caused by these important operations.

The German Defence Minister stated in interview that Germany wished to withdraw up to 300 troops from EUFOR. EUFOR wishes to clarify that its mission in BiH is regularly reviewed. EU ministers will discuss EUFOR at a meeting in November and the contributions of Troop Contributing Nations (TCNs) are always discussed in partnership with all other TCNs. There are not expected to be significant short-term changes in EUFOR's mission nor its capabilities.

However, if, in the process of reviewing EUFOR's mandate, a force reduction is considered, Germany does intend to request the withdrawal of some of its troops, in agreement with its partners. Indeed, in the longer term, it has always been envisaged that EUFOR would reduce its commitment as the country's security and law enforcement institutions become more capable and responsible for maintaining stability and security.

Even so, it must be borne in mind that troop reductions do not necessarily mean a reduction in capability, and observers should avoid jumping to that conclusion. Reviews may unearth that certain elements are unnecessary to achieve the mission and may be cut without detracting from the overall capability of EUFOR.

RTQs:

Nermin Bise, BiH TV:

Good afternoon. I have a question for Mr. Thomas from EUFOR concerning the military test range «Barbara» near the town of Glamoč . According to reports some preliminary results of the tests conducted by the Institute of Sarajevo have confirmed that there is a certain level of radioactivity in the ground and water in that area and the villages in the vicinity of the military test range «Barbara» near the town of Glamoč . Could you comment? Does this mean that shells that are prohibited from use by the Convention, in other words radioactive shells, have been used in that area where besides EUFOR the army of the Federation has been carrying out military exercises which include the destruction of weapons?

EUFOR:

If I understand correctly, you are asking whether there have been some radioactive activity in the vicinity of operations in Glamoč. Certainly I can't comment on ongoing operations. However, the idea that radioactivity or radioactive materials would be used by EUFOR is definitely to be put aside, that it would not be the case. So, I wouldn't like to comment further on that and I suspect that those reports may be misleading.