Transcript of the Press Statements given by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, and the NATO Secretary General, Right Honourable Lord George Robertson

French DetAir, Sarajevo Airport

Mr. Larry Jolidon – COMSFOR's Director of Communications

Ladies and gentlemen, the Secretary General Lord Robertson and the High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch.

Wolfgang Petritsch – OHR

Well, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. I am of course very honoured and I must say also very glad it is exactly today the 18th April which is such a defining moment for Bosnia and Herzegovina that I am having the opportunity to meet with the Secretary General.

As we speak, both the Republika Srpska and the Federation are in fact discussing the amendments to their respective constitutions, which need as you know by now, be amended by and adopted today so that the elections can take place and can

be announced this evening and can take place in time.

Now in our meeting I have briefed the Secretary General about this Agreement about the exercise right now underway, about the importance of this issue and the history of the Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement.

I can only repeat what I have said so many times now that Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entities are on the brink of taking a historic decision, which will constitutionally protect the rights of the peoples and citizens of the country across every inch of its territory.

I am convinced by now that every politician in this country, every parliamentarian is aware of the choice they are facing today.

The alternative is clear, either to contribute to moving Bosnia and Herzegovina another step, an important and dramatic step closer to modern standards, to European standards, to Euro Atlantic integration.

Or by voting against it to support, in fact and to cement the *status quo* so that Bosnia and Herzegovina remain stuck in where it is now and this, of course, is not desirable.

Well, tonight we will know more.

We will know who has made which choice; who has shown responsibility, statesmanship and vision and who has attempted to make Bosnia and Herzegovina a prisoner of the past.

Thank you so much. Secretary General, please.

Lord George Robertson – NATO

Thank you Wolfgang. Can I first of all say how delighted I am to be here and to be bringing the whole NATO Council with me

to Sarajevo?

Ten years after the war started this is a clear indication of NATO's continuing commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina and to peace and stability for its people.

Let me pay a tribute to Wolfgang Petritsch who will soon be stepping down as High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Anybody who came to this country when Wolfgang Petritsch took over and who looks around today recognises an almost completely different and much improved country.

Much of that has to do with his vision, his commitment, his dedication and his sheer persistence in getting things right to make sure that the future is secure.

History will judge that he has been one of the best friends of all of the people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Today is another day when one of the pieces of the jigsaw of recovery will be put in place. A day when the representatives of the people have the chance to vote to take Bosnia and Herzegovina out of the time warp and to re-enter mainstream modern Europe.

My very strong message to the legislators who have the vote today, is: 'It is your country, it is your choice and your vote can take Bosnia and Herzegovina out of the time warp and into Europe. Take that choice.'

The members of the NATO Council who will be here today and tomorrow will be meeting the joint Presidency, who came for the first time to meet the NATO Council in Brussels. The members of the Council, the Ambassadors of the NATO countries will be expecting the promises made in Brussels to be delivered here in Sarajevo.

That means more returns of the refugees and displaced people, more co-operation with The Hague and with the International

Criminal Tribunal and more institution building, especially in the field of defence.

It is a scandalous waste of money that Bosnia and Herzegovina is devoting ten percent of the total national income of this country to defence, three times as much as the Untied States of America and that situation must be changed.

NATO remains committed to safety and security in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is time for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to take control of their country and their future.

Thank you very much.