Transcript of Press Conference by the High Representative following a meeting of the PIC Steering Board

We have had a meeting of the Steering Board, where we discussed several items, but the two key issues are refugee return and the elections. We have also assessed the situation of the peace implementation and I have said that there has been a progress, especially since Bonn and there is a new government in RS which is complying with Dayton and at the same time is getting control of the situation. For that reason Dodik is receiving direct support through the budget, and at the same time the IC is making every effort possible to give financial support to infrastructure projects in the RS to be able to catch up with the situation in the Federation. We have been having an analysis of the progress which has been made in the last few days, and yesterday there was an agreement on the Council of Ministers location. We have proposed a special district for the Council of Ministers, the organisation of the structures of all ministries to work there, so the Common Institutions are already in place, but we are always facing problems because we never stop in trying to solve the problems and now the problems mainly are in the Federation. The return of refugees is too slow especially to the minority areas, the restructuring of the police is encountering difficulties in some areas especially in the Bosnian Croat part, and that is why we have to put every pressure on Croatia and on the Bosnian Croat authorities. At the Contact Group in Bonn where I was present, apart from the discussion on Kosovo – which has taken the focus out of Bosnia, to my despair, because this is

my business and the Kosovo one is not mine, but it has a relation, – the statement on Bosnia and Herzegovina was very easily approved. In this statement the main concern as you know is the situation in the Federation and the return of refugees. We have been discussing the return of refugees and we have presented an overall strategy with different obstacles, lack of political will, lack of security, lack of economic reconstruction and how to deal with those obstacles to remove them. The main way to do it is throughout an overall coordination and admitting that the refugee return has to be all over the country and not only in one particular area. That is to say the Sarajevo initiative to bring in all displaced persons and refugees that left Sarajevo. It is important because Sarajevo is the multi-ethnic city but at the same time we need that the people who are now occupying the houses in Sarajevo may be able to go to their homes of origin in Brcko, and the Serbs who are in Brcko and want to go back to Sarajevo may be able to do so, but also to go to Croatia if they want to go back to their homes of origin in the Krajinas. This is an overall operation that we are going to monitor and to coordinate from now on just to try to break this main stumbling block of the return of displaced persons to their homes of origin, in spite, of course, of every reluctance of assistance of the different authorities. You are aware of the Tudjman initiative of de-facto accepting the ethnic cleansing after the war by saying that the Serbs must live with the Serbs, the Croats with the Croats, the Bosniacs with the Bosniacs which is totally against Dayton and Annex 7 and the right of people to return to their homes of origin and we have to fight very strongly against that. Apart from refugees we have been talking about an issue which is very important, the elections. They are going to take place in September, 12 and 13 of September all over the country, not only for the Presidency but also for the House of Peoples and Representatives, at the Bosnia level and in both Entities, in the RS for the Assembly there and for the Assembly of the Federation, and the country, so it is a huge operation . The

results of these elections will last four years, so it is important that we introduce as much pluralism and multi-ethnicity as possible for these elections, and the way to that mainly is through the media, to open the media as much as possible all over the country. We have already achieved concrete results in the RS. We are now on the way to do it at the same time in the Federation, both in the Bosniak TV, BiH TV and also in the Croat TV and radios through a system of licences with the respect of a Charter and a Statute, as it is done in most of the western countries, and through the opening of the media and the media campaign and the OBN – the independent network which is every day watched by more people. If we receive the support of the IC in funding these projects, then we will be able to say that we have given a free media to Bosnia which is very necessary in order to have a normal type of news and not ultra-nationalist messages which inflame the spirits of the people. So we have been discussing these issues and other issues of course. This situation is complex but is evolving in the right direction but of course the shadow of Kosovo clouds over Bosnia because the consequences may be very negative if there is a conflict there in terms of the displaced people, massive movements of persons, in terms of political attitudes, there will be positioning and the exaggeration of present nationalistic tendencies from the Serbs in the RS, perhaps the Bosniaks trying to help the Albanians. You can see that there are many consequences of the Kosovo conflict on Bosnia, so I really believe that pressure in order to have a peaceful settlement of the Kosovo issue in terms of the Bonn communiqué would be achieved and there would be a dialogue between the Serb authorities, FRY authorities and the Albanians in order to reach a high degree of autonomy, self government for Kosovo, within the respect of the international borders of Yugoslavia. So this is what the meeting has been dealing with, and I am open to your questions.

Question: You said that President Tudjman is in breach of

Dayton, that the Bosnian Croat authorities are also impeding the restructuring of the police, there have been negative signs from the EU regarding Croatia. Do you envisage any measures against Croatia and against the Bosnian Croats to bring them into line ?

Carlos Westendorp: If the situation doesn't improve. There are signs that there are some minor improvements. For instance, I had to remove the Mayor of Stolac because he was in contradiction with Dayton. He didn't accept the return of refugees, he didn't protect the displaced persons' homes and physical integrity, so we went to see President Tudjman and asked him to remove the Mayor of Stolac. This demarche, together with my letter saying that he should resign, had an effect and in fact he has been replaced. The person who is now in his place, the new Mayor, is accepting the return of refugees. I think that there are some improvements but the main improvements, so to speak, the return of refugees to stop this idea of taking Croats from Central Bosnia and putting them in Herzegovina in order to be prepared for the future secession, or future partition, is something that the IC is not going to accept. We know that there are companies, financed by Croatia which are already bringing Croats from Central Bosnia to Herzegovina, to Mostar, this has to be stopped and of course if this is not stopped the IC is going to put pressure, and even sanctions on Croatia.

Question: Which specific plans do you plan to put in action to get these refugees to come back to BiH in general ?

Carlos Westendorp: It is our main challenge. The displaced persons should return to their place or origin in the minority areas, that is to say in the areas in which they are in the minority would be the litmus test that the reconciliation process has already started. Until this happens we cannot really say there is a real progress in that direction and we are putting all our efforts in achieving the results, concrete results in concrete areas. One is putting pressure on the

Croatian authorities to accept the return of Krajina Serbs which are now living mainly in Banja Luka, that Banja Luka accepts, and there will be a Conference there next month, accepts the returns of Bosniaks and Croats to Banja Luka, that people living in Brcko may be able to come back to Sarajevo, that people who are in Sarajevo displaced may be able to go to Banja Luka and to Brcko. So this is an operation that will have to start this spring and summer because this is the moment that this movement can be done but will have to accelerate this year and perhaps next year when there is more security, when the police has been restructured, when there is no risks of being beaten or their houses burned at that very moment the movement towards return would accelerate. But for the time being we are working on these areas very hard to try to achieve concrete results. The situation now is so bad in terms of return of displaced persons to the minority areas, only 80,000 people have returned to the minority areas. Any improvement of any presence would create already the acceleration necessary to fulfill our target for the coming two years, which I think there will be a substantial return of refugees. Of course, not all of them are going to return to their homes of origin, some of them would prefer to stay in different places but at least our task would not be completed until there is a substantial return of refugees to the minority areas.

Question: How many people are displaced ?

Carlos Westendorp: There are around in total 1,000,000-1,200,000 people displaced, abroad and within the territory. Abroad now there must be around 600,000, and 300,000 have already returned most of them to the majority areas, and 80,000 to the minority areas. There is still a room for around half a million people to be reallocated.

Question: In the run up to the elections you mentioned that you will be coordinating the media action, obviously the OSCE is also strongly involved in that coordination before the

elections. And also the EU Commission is setting up the democracy foundation which is going to have a coordinating role. There seems to be some concern at least in Sarajevo that this has been done with various parties not talking very much to each other. How can you guarantee that the IC is working together rather than working in different directions ?

Carlos Westendorp: The media strategy is coordinated by my office and by this gentleman who is on my left (Simon Haselock).He can explain this strategy to you. Mainly it is a reform of the media, the possibilities of a media strategy campaign for the political parties to be able to express their ideas, not ethnically based but ideologically based ideas on issues of common interest to the Bosnian people, and thirdly by the independent media, and one of these pillars is the OBN. This has been coordinated by us, but the OSCE of course in terms of the electoral campaign is working very closely with us and they have their own responsibility in terms of allocation of time to the political parties etc. And this is always done by the OSCE in consultation with the political parties. The main problem with the situation in BiH as you know is that in the RS there are more political parties than in the Federation, there is more pluralism. Especially after the last elections in which President Plavsic has a portion of the total share of power. SDS, the Karadjic party, has lost the great part of the influence that it had, the Radicals, Dodik Party – the Social Democrats, the Socialists of Milosevic and the Bosniaks and Croats who are able to vote in the RS. So there is a spectrum of the plural parties in the RS although if they are plural they are mono-ethnic, they are mainly Serb parties. This is going to be difficult to change except if those who want to be elected in these elections will need the vote of the Croats and the Bosniaks, so it is in the interest of these parties at least to incorporate the ideas of these two ethnic groups. In the Federation the situation is different. There are pluri-ethnic parties which are mainly the opposition parties, which have not that many votes and there

are two monopolistic, mono-ethnic parties, the SDA and the HDZ. What we have to do through the media is to create more multi-ethnicity throughout programmes, through ideas, more ideology in the parties and also to give more opportunities to the opposition parties to express themselves and present projects of their own and the people will elect them in function of what they are able to give to them, because today you know if you don't belong to the party, to the SDA, and you are a Bosniak, it is difficult for you to have an apartment, or to have a job and the people know it. This is why in some municipalities the population is fed up with this kind of single party system and will vote for a different kind of political party, but these political parties are not going to be able to pass on their message if the TV and radio is controlled by the mono-ethnic party. This is why to open up the media is fundamental. EU Commission is cooperating with us very much, they are giving us a lot of support and money. It is the main donor. That is something that is not known in Bosnia because, as I told you once before, everybody salutes me saying "thank God you came, you Americans".

Simon Haselock: There are four main players as far as the media is concerned, ourselves as the coordinators, the OSCE who has the specific mandate vis ŕ vis the elections, EU Commission and the USAID/USIS machinery. It is coordinated, that is the bottom line. For instance one of the things that we have been discussing at today's Steering Board was that very issue. The Commission which we are going to establish, and which was in the Bonn document, the Intermediate Media Standards and Licensing Commission is going to funded by all these people that you mentioned. It will be staffed by some international staff and locals; the working relationship for that is the input between us and the OSCE, and the EU Commission's very heavily involved in it. That is certainly one area that we are very confident about saying the problem is not the coordination. The problem, if anything, is to make sure that people deliver their promises in terms of funding.

That’s always the problem.

Question: What is the role that could play the paramilitary forces, like the Guardia Civil, the Carabinieri for the return of refugees ?

Carlos Westendorp: I believe that the presence of troops is absolutely important. These special police forces will be integrated into SFOR, these will be military forces and not the police forces. They will not have policing functions. They are going to be more specialised in some areas, the population movement control, anti-mob activities. On the one hand more than the soldiers, because the soldiers usually have tanks, they have big guns but they do not have the instruments, the shields of the smoke bombs, the kind of specialisation that is necessary for these kind of activities. This wouldn’t be a normal police, they would not substitute the activity of the international police the IPTF as you know is unarmed, they have no weapons, but they train and restructure the local police and they also ask the local police to intervene in police activities. These special forces would be the ones who would secure the environment in these specialist activities, and at the same time they would have more mobility because at present the SFOR forces are divided into different sectors and each sector is controlled by one country or group of countries, and in this particular situation where there will be displaced persons, movements, perhaps some difficulties in replacing mayors, in implementing the results of the municipal elections, etc, it will be necessary to go to different places in a more mobile form and in a more specialist way and that is why I think the NATO countries are considering this proposal of the specialist police which are mainly the ones you mentioned – the Guardia Civil, Carabinieri and Gendarmes. If it is not mixed up with police activities it can be very efficient.

Question: You said that there will be a free media if you get the support from the IC for projects, more money. What do you

mean by “if” you get the support ?

Simon Haselock: We have the support of the IC in terms of commitments in Bonn etc.but there are a number of projects, that require specific funds, the Commission will require to be funded. To run a public information campaign in terms of TV and advertisement production – that requires funds, and clearly the OBN, which has been a substantial project over the last two years and which is now, according to an independent quantitative analysis, beginning at last to actually bear fruit, requires another round of funding to sustain it and turn it from what is an internationally funded project into an imbedded commercially funded project. We are always short of funds, and at the moment, for instance, we had a Governing Council meeting for the OBN last week and we only had got pledged about half of what is required to sustain it and keep it operational for the next twelve months.

Question: Could you explain what the Open Broadcast Network is ?

Simon Haselock: The Open Broadcast Network is cross-entity independent TV project. The idea of restructuring broadcasting which, for instance in BiH, has been a healthy public service network, ie those TV networks which are funded by public money, juxtaposed by the commercial broadcasting set up. None of the current public service broadcasters broadcast across the whole of the country. The aim of the OBN was to establish independent and political control completely equal in terms of editorial style, multi-ethnic, cross entity, and that has been established. It’s had some difficulty in actually getting the management sorted out, some difficulty in establishing its programme profile and some difficulty in establishing its full footprint. It is now much more effective than it has been before and it requires funding to sustain it for the period of this year.

Question: The cooperative attitude from the monopolistic

parties, is it mainly Croats and Muslims or do you have problems in opening of the channels ?

Carlos Westendorp: With the RS you remember that we had to take the transmitters by force and after that with the Dodik Government we negotiated very quickly the arrangements, so now it is perfectly functioning. We have an international supervisor in this station, so I think this is working quite well. Now we are in quite advanced conversations with the RTV BiH and with the different televisions in the Croat area. I think that the result of this conversation is going quite well. The Croat side, because the Federation TV for the time being is not Federation TV, it is only Bosniak TV. The Croats are very much interested in having also programmes in their own language, programmes with their own culture and to be able also to express their views and to open up to make it open to all ethnic groups. This is something that the Croat side is cooperating with. They are also doing that in HTV Mostar which is a private station but it was terrible two or three months ago, and now it is being monitored and we have no complains about their impartiality. There are radios which are very problematic because they are broadcasting ultra-nationalist messages and we have to deal with them. In general this system of a statute with the charter of good journalism, principles that have to be respected by the broadcasters, and at the same time a licensing system which will be granted to those who comply with these requirements, is something that I think everybody is going to accept and I am quite confident that very soon we could have this system in place also in the Federation.

Question: Muslim TV is the most problematic ?

Carlos Westendorp: It has always been less problematic than others because it is more multi-ethnic in mentality but of course it is always biased in favour of the ruling party, and something that is difficult for the parties is to accept – that they cannot control the TV and the station. That is not

the property of the party but it is the property of the population, of the country.

Simon Hasleock: If I could expand on this. The essence of the problem in BiH is that there is no legal framework which we have in a normal democracy to regulate the media. The law and the legal framework in that area is completely chaotic. Some of it is pre-war Yugoslav law, some of it is entity law which is developed by common practice and there is nothing that actually sets down a set of minimum standards, both in engineering terms, to manage frequencies, and in content, and professional standards to monitor the way they broadcast. The crucial element of this is this media commission, which you have heard about and which is going to be established in the next few weeks and which will set down the set of licensing standards. Those licensing standards are the sorts of things that you have in most western democracies where, it will set down the licensing criteria for frequency management so frequencies are properly allocated and don't interfere with each other, and it is managed effectively in that regard, and also a set of minimum content standards. If you want a licence, you will have to conform to certain principles and, if you don't conform to those principles, you will not be licensed. In establishing that commission, the Entities and the State Government will be part of it. This is not a Commission run by a dictat; the agreement of the parties and the agreement of the Government has been included in the establishment of this Commission. The international support will be to provide the technical assistance, not to provide the authority. It will be underwritten by existing law and by the Provisional Election Commission rules and regulations which manage this area at the moment in terms of the run up to the elections. This will be the system which will make sure that, through a legal and legitimate western model, everything from a radio station to a TV network establishes a set of minimum standards and behaves in a responsible fashion in terms of being open, pluralist, free and fair.

Question: Who is controlling the Pale media, newspapers and wire services ?

Carlos Westendorp: TV as you now is already in Banja Luka and they will use also Pale studio but it is absolutely under the control of this Independent Board of Directors. Some newspapers, Oslobodjenje, all the team has been sacked by Dodik Government, and there is a new team in place.

Simon Haselock: Basically, Oslobodjenje and Glas Srpski have both had a management shake up. Serb Oslobodjenje hasn't published for a while until they have sorted it. Srna is still in Pale but it represents the Dodik Government because it is a state agency. It is still based in Pale although all the others intend to move to Banja Luka. We have had some difficulties with Srna but essentially is much improved, certainly Serb Oslobodjenje and Glas Srpski have improved considerably and SRT ironically is likely to turn into an example to everybody.

Question: Usually you mention the hard-liners, Karadzic. What happened to them ? Are those hard-liners joining Dodik now ?

Carlos Westendorp: The people you are referring to, the indicted war criminals – in the last months they are surrendering themselves. There has been a movement in the RS, some of them, which are not the main ones, of course. The main one you are referring to, Karadzic, is losing every day his protection in terms of police and in terms of illegal income. Because now the cigarettes, the petrol, and liquors, customs duties are controlled by the customs officers in RS, and the money that these people are getting from the old illegal activities is no longer there. What I believe is that the circle which protected Karadjic is becoming looser and looser and the rope against Karadzic is tightening and I am convinced either he will surrender or he will be in any case in the Hague in not so distant time.

Question: Are you sure that he is still in Bosnia ?

Carlos Westendorp: We don't know but people say that he may be still there.

Question: By not distant time. End of the year ?

Carlos Westendorp: I think that he should be in the Hague before that… He should be in no longer than one month's time (rhetorical). It is clear that he has more difficulties to remain in Eastern RS which is being controlled by the new government. Of course the new government is not going to, we cannot ask Dodik to do it by himself because we have to take into account that he is not in a very strong position in the Government because he has only 43 or 44 votes in the Assembly, which is two more than the votes that he needs. But he is taking control little by little of Eastern RS. There are more municipalities in favour and cooperating with the new Government. So the fundamentals of power in Eastern RS are crumbling and he is not so safe now as he was two months ago. I always said that the best way is that he goes by his own feet to the Hague. If not, it would be easier to do it now than before. In the mandate of SFOR is to arrest war criminals when the circumstances so permit. And we believe that the circumstances are more and more permissive.

Question: Are you speaking in terms what you would like to see or what will happen ?

Carlos Westendorp: I am speaking in terms of what I would like to see. But it doesn't prevent that my preferences are not going to be also supported by facts.

Question: What about Mladic ?

Carlos Westendorp: Mladic is also an important indicted person. He is less protected, he is not in control of any illegal activity so I believe that he is not as protected as Karadjic. He could be more available, yes. This I think will

need Milosevic's cooperation because he spends a lot of time in Serbia and Montenegro.

Question: You said earlier that Kosovo can cast a shadow over the elections in BiH.

Carlos Westendorp: Not on the September elections. Kosovo in general may cast a shadow on the peace implementation process. In terms of displaced persons, social and economic repercussions if there are sanctions or blockades, arms embargoes, but mainly not that the arms embargo is going to be a problem but embargo in general, movement of goods may effect the countries of the region, Bulgaria, Romania, but the RS is also going to be affected. In political terms you can imagine that, if there is a conflict between Serbs and Albanians, the two sides in Bosnia will take sides. The two main ethnic groups would be obliged to take sides. It may have a very serious impact in case of conflict. If the conflict doesn't happen of course this is not going to happen, except the possible sanctions on Milosevic may have an effect on the RS especially.

Question: Is there a deadline for Tudjman government to give a clear signs that he is complying with Dayton before you are thinking of sanctions ?

Carlos Westendorp: We have no special deadlines in terms of specific date. We will need movement in the two coming weeks, otherwise the IC is going to lose their patience and sanctions will come very soon. I won't give more than 15 days to start with sanctions.

Question: What sorts of sanctions would you have in mind ?

Carlos Westendorp: Croatia has a lot of interest in becoming a part of Europe. They are already in the Council of Europe so you can imagine some action there. But of course I will advise the IC, and the IC has to consider that, but I don't know what the Council of Europe, which is an independent organisation,

will do, but they can do a lot of things there. They are also having a lot of relations with the IMF, the World Bank, that is precisely what Tudjman would like to have, relations with these two institutions. He may not have them in the future. There is also an investment programme in Croatia, that can be also stopped. There is also a very strong will of Croatia to participate in Train and Equip and Partnership for Peace, which is a military cooperation with the west, that may be stopped. You can imagine all sorts of consequences.