

OHR and SFOR act to prevent intimidation at Banja Luka

On the basis of clear evidence presented to him this evening by the chief of police in Banja Luka, Ambassador Klein, The Principal Deputy High Representative has determined that the large numbers of buses entering the town this evening contain people intending to provoke disorder and probable violence in connection with the SDS rally due to be held in the town. They pose a serious threat to the town and to those citizens attending the rally in good faith.

This is totally unacceptable to the people of Banja Luka, to the Office of The High Representative, to SFOR and the International Community.

The SDS and any other party are entitled to hold a peaceful rally in Banja Luka without such threats. The elections taking place on 13 and 14 September are municipal elections which by definition are confined to the local area. The people of Banja Luka are entitled to go about their lives and participate in the democratic process, without organised thuggery being bussed into their community from outside.

Following urgent consultations between Ambassador Klein and SFOR, SFOR will immediately turn back buses and their occupants which it considers to be entering Banja Luka without good reason, or intent on undermining public order. SFOR will employ all necessary force in doing so.

Evidence collected by the Banja Luka police within the last 24 hours from individuals recently arrived in the town includes hand grenades, unspecified weapons and forged ID.

Ambassador Klein, who flew to Banja Luka this evening will stay on the scene until the situation returns to normal. The International Community will not tolerate any challenges to its authority or threats to public order.