Transcript of the farewell press conference by the High Representative, Carlos Westendorp, following the PIC Steering Board meeting

Carlos Westendorp: Thank you very much for your attendance at this press conference after the Steering Board meeting, which appears to be my last one as High Rep. I came two years ago to Bosnia and I thought when I accepted the job, and I said publicly, that it was an impossible, almost an impossible task, and I said almost because I wanted to keep some margin of manoeuver, and some optimism. Now I can say that this was not an impossible job. It was a difficult one, it is still a very difficult one but it can be done, and it can succeed, it has to succeed for the benefit of the whole region. I still believe that even if the Kosovo problem has detracted some attention from the International Community, Bosnia is the key for the region, and together with Bosnia its neighbours are very important. A full democratisation of the whole region, economic, free market, and the respect of the existing borders are the three key issues for the whole region and I think this is what rightly the Stability Pact is going to address. I really believe that the future and the destiny of the South Eastern Europe region is to re-join the European Institutions. This region has been a problem until now, not a long history, because history shows that perhaps in the western side of Europe we have had more problems than in this part of Europe and the way to overcome these difficulties is by integrating into the European Institutions, and I think that Bosnia has to make an effort to join the Council of Europe first, and then to fulfil the obligations of the Stability Pact. I have been

making an assessment of these two years. I still think that the bottle is half full but there is still some space of the bottle to be filled and this is going to be the task of my successor who has been nominated by the European Union, accepted and appointed by all the members of the Steering Board unanimously today, Mr. Wolfgang Petritsch, who is an Austrian Ambassador. He has been in the region for quite a while, being the European Union Envoy to Kosovo, and at the same time my two deputies are also leaving. Jacques Klein hopefully will succeed Elisabeth Rehn as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN in Sarajevo. Hanns Schumacher will go to the Mission of Germany to the UN. To replace them Ralph Johnson from the US, Ambassador in Bratislava at present, will be the principal deputy, and Matei Hoffmann, a German diplomat currently in Rome as number two, will be replacing Hanns Schumacher. The situation in Bosnia is encouraging, there is more reconciliation, people are travelling across the IEBL, there is more freedom of movement, there are many issues which are already in place but there are many issues that need to be done as quickly as possible in order to be able to integrate the country in a prosperous, democratic region. This is not going to happen overnight. This is going to take some time but I think it will take less time than we think. I leave the job with mixed feelings. I think I have, we have all together, accomplished an important period of time. I feel sorry for leaving now, because after two years of working in Bosnia you get to love the people, to understand them better, and to try to help them and whenever you leave something which is not 100 percent finished you have the feeling that many more things could be done. I have been elected a member of the European Parliament and I owe that to my family, a kind of quieter life than the one I have been carrying on until now. This is in a nutshell the substance of the meeting today and there will be hopefully a meeting in Sarajevo of the Stability Pact. I will remain there until then and I hope to see you there.

I am ready to answer your questions.

Simon Haselock: There is a statement from the Steering Board meeting itself which you can pick up after the press conference, which paraphrases what the High Representative said to you now. Questions please.

Question: I was wondering what will be the hardest task for your successor now, and when you speak of the bottle being only half full, could you be more specific perhaps on the issue of war criminals. We were talking about this for the last two years. To what extent is the bottle only half full, or even less than half full on that particular issue ?

Carlos Westendorp: As far as war criminals are concerned, talking about the numbers, the bottle is more than half full as you know because more than half are already in the Hague. The problem is that the most relevant ones, at least the two most relevant ones, are still at large and this is of course something that I regret deeply. I thought that this issue could be solved during my tenure, unfortunately it has not been done. So I hope that my successor will be luckier, I mean it is nothing that depends on the High Representative as you know. It depends on individual nations and individual forces of nations to do this action. I hope that that will be done during his tenure, and this is why I say to you that I hope he will be luckier, but it is not that I have not asked for that as a necessity for the total reconciliation of the country and putting the blame on individuals and not necessary a collective blame on the whole nation. This is something which is necessary in ethical terms, it is necessary also in practical terms because until such a time there will be no normal life in Bosnia and in Yugoslavia, where there have been as you know new indictees which are also very outstanding and important.

Question: As a consequence, if that is the case, do you think that this will provoke real changes in the Republika Srpska?

Is it important for internal development?

Carlos Westendorp: I think so. I believe that the indictment of Slobodan Milosevic has introduced a new dynamic in the Yugoslavia problem. Against what some people thought at the beginning that this indictment was going to put in jeopardy the actions of the international community was not the case. The peace agreement, the cease-fire was signed a few days after Milosevic was indicted, contrary what people believed at the beginning. This is just the starting point now. The situation should be monitored and see how this can be carried out. In Bosnia I tend to think that this will consolidate the process of the normalisation of the country. I believe that the effect will be a healthy one. I have always believed that, but of course it is something that is not without risk and this is what I understand the situation of the troops as have to carry out that operation. But in any case the situation in the Republika Srpska is already improving. There is moderation in the government, the SLOGA coalition is stronger than ever precisely because as a consequence of the situation in the FRY. The people in the RS want to have a normal life, want to cooperate with the international community. They know and they are certain that this is the only way to overcome their very serious economic problems nowadays, and I tend to believe that this is going in the right direction. In the Federation the problems are still the lack of trust between the two constituent peoples there, but I am also optimistic if I consider the evolution in the neighbourhood. Evolution in FRY is absolutely necessary but evolution also in Croatia towards a further democratisation of the system, better economic results, further integration into the European Institutions and possibly a change in the government, if the elections in Croatia give the result that the opinion pools are telling us. This will have a clear impact on the behaviour of the Bosnian Croats in Bosnia and also indirectly on Bosniaks behaviour which is not one of cooperation as it should be in the Federation. Two constituent peoples have to be equally

treated. I think the only way to solve the problems of the Federation is by respecting equally the rights of the two constituent peoples there and that everybody feels that their tradition, their language, their culture are respected and there is no domination of one ethnic group against the other. And this is only possible when there is a democratic system in the whole region. You cannot have a democracy working surrounded by totalitarian systems in one way or another.

Question: Could you perhaps give an assessment of the main problems that the International Community encountered in its reconstruction efforts in BiH ? Could you make a comparison between those efforts in BiH and Kosovo ?

Carlos Westendorp: The problems are still very big. Reconstruction of the infrastructure has been done by the International Community, with the help of the International Community, and I think that nowadays we have the same level as BiH had before the war, in terms of roads, water supply, electricity, this has been done. It took a long time, longer than in Kosovo hopefully because the destruction was much bigger in Bosnia than in Kosovo. Especially the last missions of the UN have found that the destruction is not as great as we had all thought. I believe that in Kosovo the reconstruction is going to be easier and faster. But reconstruction is not enough for having an economy that works. Unfortunately and although we have created the necessary macro economic activities and reforms in order to be able to allow the businessmen to operate, the economy situation is very poor in BiH. There is something like 35/40 % unemployment as an average, and in some places 100 % unemployment, especially in eastern RS. Bureaucracy is all over the place, to invest in Bosnia is a nightmare. Just ask for instance Volkswagen problems that they are still having. As Jacques Klein likes to say, something must be very wrong because BiH is the only place where MacDonalds has not been able to establish. There is a lot of bureaucracy, lot of obstacles, a lot of

inheritance from communistic behaviours that make business a nightmare in BiH and this has to be changed. The International Community is there to help, little by little. We have now to address the problems of the smaller and medium enterprises, to create a banking system, a financial system for credit. This is something that has to be done but it will take time. I tend to think that the economic recovery is going be the most difficult task for the country because this is something that we cannot substitute the locals. I can take a law, I can put a law into force, I can dismiss a mayor or a president of an entity, but what we cannot do is to do business on their behalf. This is something for the Bosnians to do. Some of them are doing it, but some of them are doing it in their own way, that is to say with corruption, not paying taxes, not paying custom duties etc. This is something that also has to be addressed. We are doing that but we need also to reinforce the judicial system, the prosecutors etc. This is a slow task, it will take time. It doesn't depend only on the International Community, it depends mainly on the local people to start to learn how to work and how to compete in our modern world.

Question: That means that flow of foreign investment will not come to BiH before all these problems are solved ?

Carlos Westendorp: Foreign investment and the domestic investment. Not only foreign, it could be also domestic investment. But private investment, private money is not going to come in big amounts if all these problems are not solved. They are coming, they are heroes, they are taking risks but not in the amount that the country will need. Nobody dares. You know the capitalist is a very cowardly animal.

Question: The role of SFOR, how long SFOR will stay in Bosnia, for how many years, its future ?

Carlos Westendorp: They are planning now a gradual phasing down of their presence. They started with 60,000, up to 30,000 now and maybe further reduction later in the year. If you ask

me how many soldiers are necessary I couldn't answer you because this is something that depends of what these soldiers are going to do. I believe that you can reduce without putting in jeopardy the secure environment and to cope with the two different armies that may have the temptation of going back again to war. This is why SFOR is necessary on the ground. I think that this has been achieved. At the same time what we have to do is to build up a mutual trust between the two armies, to cooperate together, make train and equipping together, reducing their expenditure in defence and be prepared to have a common defence policy, not one army because this is against Dayton but at least to have common defence policy in the future and then the SFOR could withdraw entirely from the country. How long this is going to take I don't know. There is another type of presence which is necessary to secure environment for the refugee return and there SFOR is very instrumental. If there is a too sharp reduction of SFOR presence then it can put in jeopardy the operation of refugee return. So what I will tell you is that maybe the quantity of troops can be reduced but the quality of the troops should be improved in terms of more specialised units to cope with riots, demonstrations against refugee return, so in a nutshell to be more precise more MSUs. Multi-national specialist units.

Question: At the end of your mandate what did you fail the most ?

Carlos Westendorp: If you ask me personally I would tend to say that it is not a matter of failure it is a matter of frustration. I would have liked to do more in refugee return mainly, into minority areas. I would have liked to do many more things than that. We have done quite a lot but I mean the bottle is still half full, half empty. I am not frustrated because I couldn't fill the bottle in two years, I knew that that is not possible in two years. I always said that Bosnia will take time. At least one generation. But one thing that is very frustrating is the slow path of refugee returns to

minority areas. It is perhaps due to the model that we have chosen in Dayton, that is to say a light presence of the International Community, it is not a protectorate. We do not have a police, a judicial system, our own army in order to protect refugees back but the model chosen was a different one, is a kind of intrusive collaborator, a helping hand, sometimes this hand that helps a little bit, but it is not a real protectorate. This is why we could not speed up the process of refugee return, to protect them not to force them to go back . We have to be very explicit on that. If refugees do not want to go back I don't think that it is moral to force them to go back to their homes but those who wish to go and there are many who have already told us that they would like to be helped shall have the right to go back to their homes. The figures are rather high, more than 100,000 people who told us that they would like to go back to their homes and for that what needs to be done is to encourage the FRY on the one hand and Croatia on the other hand to take their own refugees back, in great numbers as you know. Croatian government accepting the Serbs who used to live in Croatia in big numbers will allow for a much better situation for other people to go back to their homes which are now occupied by these refugees. The operation is not limited to Bosnia, it has also to be extended to the whole region, mainly to the FRY and to Croatia and this is why in this communiqu you will see a mention of the need of the neighbouring countries to fulfil their obligations in Dayton in particular with refugee return. You can expect that the International Community bilaterally and collectively in the Stability Pact is going to make very strong conditions on this refugee return in Croatia.

Question: What are the main conclusions of the Steering Board today ?

Carlos Westendorp: We have revised the implementation. The assessment is positive. They have endorsed the action of the High Representative. They have appointed a new High

Representative, with some dissatisfaction with the inadequate functioning of the common institutions and joint Federation Institutions, the performance of elected officials and the base of economic reform. This is why the Steering Board has urged the leaders of Bosnia to reach these objectives and deadlines set up in the Madrid Declaration. If Madrid Declaration is fulfilled at the end of the year I tend to think that we would have made a very substantial leap forward in the implementation of the Dayton Agreement. So far there is still obstructionism, reluctance to take decisions etc. So I tend to think that my successor is going to be obliged to take also sometimes action when the local authorities fail to do so. I know that some press reports said that he would prefer not to do that. I can tell you that I would have preferred not to have to do that but I think that this is inevitable.

Question: Could you give us your opinion on the aid to Yugoslavia ? Plan for South Eastern Europe. Give the aid to Mr. Milosevic or not give it to him ?

Carlos Westendorp: That is the main problem. I think that the Serb people deserve a better future. They are very good people but they have very bad leadership. Yugoslavia is going to become one important country in the European Institutions but for that the Serb people need to get rid of their bad leaders. One of them is Slobodan Milosevic but it is not the only one. This is a must, a condition for the International Community to give financial, commercial and political support that the Yugoslav people deserve. This is a condition that all countries have already announced but they will repeat it in the next meeting.

Question: Everybody are saying that Serbs will have to get rid of Milosevic. How, they tried several times, they went to demonstrations, there is an opposition movement ?

Carlos Westendorp: I think that you are right. I think that the International Community has not been coherent enough in

their approach to Mr. Milosevic. In many cases the International Community thought that with Mr. Milosevic we could find out ways and means to solve the problems in the region. Without realising that he was not a solution, but he was a part of the problem if not the main problem. This is the virtue of this clear indictment by the Hague Tribunal. There is no possibility of looking back and falling into the temptation of making any deals with him anymore. This is no longer possible. I think that we have reached the point of no return in International Community relations with Milosevic. And at the same time what we are seeing are clear signs of different origin within Serbia that he should go. Not only the democratic forces but also the nationalistic forces for different reasons because they believe these nationalistic forces that he has not done a good job during this crisis. I think that he is more and more isolated. I tend to believe that this movement this time is going to lead to his withdrawal from the political scene.

Question: Are you talking about him losing the elections ? He can manipulate the elections as well, he did it before.

Carlos Westendorp: You are right. I think that the media have to be reformed, the democratic institutions have to be in place before elections are considered as democratic and free. I think that one of the main mistakes was that elections took place and everybody was very happy. OSCE monitored these elections, but we all knew that these elections were flawed in substance. I don’t think elections in present circumstances are going to be a remedy. If you carry out elections now you know that the result is not going to be a democratic one. The only way is just to use all means of pressure from the different political forces in Yugoslavia to convince him that the best solution for him is to withdraw from politics. And then allow the country a peaceful transition towards the democracy.

Question: Then we are back to square one ? Yugoslav people

will be punished again.

Carlos Westendorp: Yes. This is one of the sad elements of dealing with these autocrats. When you apply sanctions it is the people who suffer. I have never been too inclined to use sanctions against dictators because what you do usually is to reinforce them and to punish their people. But you have to also take into account the considerations of the International Community that by helping somebody, people having a dictator in the leadership of the country.

Question: In the Government in Bosnia, in the political elite in Bosnia, there is still same problem of mentality. The Government, the most important structure, in state and in finance. How to change it ?

Carlos Westendorp: Change of mentality is a slow process, especially after a cruel war between citizens of the same country. It takes time to heal these wounds and it takes time before people vote for ideological options and not for nationalistic options. But we can see encouraging signs of people diverting from voting nationalistic and voting more according to their ideology, especially when the economic situation is very bad. Then you have a problem of nationalism and you have a problem of communism, remnants of communism, which usually accustom the people to vote as a liturgical act to those who are in power. The two elements together prevent people from realising that by exercising their right to vote they can change the situation. What I am seeing in Bosnia every month that passes by is that people are really telling their leaders that they are responsible for their situation and that they have to change. And they are ready to change by their vote. For instance when we are now discussing the electoral system, the new electoral law, the interest of the population on this new law is very, very high, much more than in any of our countries. Because in our countries whenever you are going to change an electoral system and talking about the single transferable vote, of proportional representation, of

alternative voting system, people don’t care about that. This is mainly for politicians. But now the population is participating very actively, and what they want is to participate more in the election system, for instance there is an overwhelming majority of the people consulted, normal people in the street in favour of open lists. They want to choose directly the people and not necessarily those who are proposed by the political parties. I see these elements, that are not very concrete elements, of deep democratisation, of deep willing to become a democratic country of Bosnia and that makes me hopeful.

Question: In the last two years what was your worst and the best event, situation, something that you really want to remember ?

Carlos Westendorp: My best experiences, in a few cases because unfortunately our activity there doesn’t allow us for too much spare time to talk to the people, my best impressions are when you talk to the normal people on the street , or you talk to the people in intellectual circles, and you listen to something totally different from you are listening to from politicians. My best experience is with the people, and my worst experience is with the politicians. Not on a personal basis because after some time you become a friend of those politicians but I do not hate them as persons but I don’t like them as politicians.

Question: Are you going to write a book ?

Carlos Westendorp: I will try. I have a lot of good memories. I wouldn’t like to write a boring book. I would like to do something more like a novel, based upon reality. My memoirs but using the most appealing moments in my time in Bosnia. If I succeed I will publish it.

Question: Could you tell us that all the time you have been just, balanced, unbiased with all parties ?

Carlos Westendorp: In my official behaviour yes. I tried to be balanced. As I told you I dislike equally the leadership of the different constituent peoples. What I think is that they are different . They have different agendas, different backgrounds, different feelings. We have to make an effort to understand all of them. It is clear that the Bosniaks were the victims at the beginning. It is clear that they are the majority now in BiH, and the other two constituent peoples feel that they are in minority. We have to understand the Croat feeling that they are a less numerous constituent people and their interests need to be duly taken into account. We have to understand also the Serb mentality because they have been constantly receiving propaganda which is putting them as the damned ones of the earth, the victims of the International Community, those who are not liked by the entire world, except perhaps North Korea and some other countries which is the quotation made by Mr. Poplasen. All of them are different . We have to make an effort to understand their problems and we have to treat them equally but in a different way because not all of them are equal.

Thank you very much.