

Article by Amb. Jacques P. Klein, Principal Deputy High Representative

Saturday 31 January

My last day in Washington. I came back here for a few days military duty – in my part time job as a Major General in the US Air Force Reserve (which, somewhat surprisingly, is in fact the third largest Air Force in the world). I also had consultations with Bob Gelbard, the President and Secretary of State's Special Envoy for Dayton implementation, and other colleagues at the State Department. I also did the rounds on Capitol Hill, explaining to legislators how things are going in Bosnia, why the United States need to stay engaged here and, most importantly, trying to get hard cash to help with reconstruction in the RS and the rest of the country. Defence Minister Susak of Croatia was also in town, so I was able to help out a little with his visit, as well as find time to deliver a lecture at the Reserve Officers' Association convention. But by early evening it was time to say goodbye once again to my long-suffering wife, to pack and to leave a cold and snowy Washington for a cold and snowy Bosnia.

Sunday 1 February

After a long night flight across the Atlantic, I swapped planes at Frankfurt and then again at Vienna for the familiar Austrian Airlines flight down to Sarajevo. Fortunately, on this occasion, it was not cancelled due to bad weather or worse still diverted to Split. I would not have relished a six hour minibus ride after over twelve hours flying and changing planes. Before long the MD11 was entering the no fly zone over Bosnia, and making the habitual descent into Sarajevo airport. The clouds gave way to a spectacular view of barren, snow covered hills below – a reminder that, despite the horrors of recent years, this place still possesses some of the most beautiful scenery in the world.

Then we were on the ground. I was picked up by my team and we headed into Sarajevo and straight for the OHR, for a meeting on licence plates. The new licence plate for Bosnia was, at last, to be formally unveiled at a ceremony the next day and we wanted to make sure that we had the final details for the ceremonies properly worked out. Then there was time to go through the papers which had accumulated during my absence in Washington, and the e-mails too, before heading home for supper and bed.

Monday 2 February

Staff meeting, followed by an official photograph. Then a meeting on the media with Simon Haselock and the media team at the OHR, before walking across the road to preside at the ceremony to unveil the new licence plate at the Cantonal Interior Ministry building. Hanns Schumacher had travelled to Banja Luka to launch the licence plate there, and Bill Farrand was doing the same in Bijelina. Here in Sarajevo, the plate was launched a triumvirate consisting of me, my old friend Elizabeth Rehn, the new Head of the UN mission here in Bosnia, and Minister Zilic, the Federation Interior Minister, with Gen Mansuy, the Deputy Commander of Sfor taking part as well. We were accompanied by a large posse of journalists, all pushing and shoving to get a better shot. Most important, we had managed to find a car belonging to a colleague in the office which would have the honour of being the first car in BiH to bear the new plate.

Personally, I was really delighted to be able to mark this day at last. The new plate really will, I believe, help people

to be able to drive freely around the country without fear of intimidation. The old licence plates say clearly where your car and – most people assume – you come from. All too often they serve merely as invitation to get beaten up. The new plates are completely anonymous. They use three numbers followed by the letters followed by three numbers – and the letters will be drawn from the seven letters common to the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets. The numbers will be issued completely randomly, so it will not be possible for people to tell at a glance where a car comes from. The plates will be available from 15 February, and for the first two months will only cost DM15 – after that they will double in price to DM30 – so buy yours quickly. End of commercial!

The ceremony went well, and the licence plates were duly affixed to the Renault 5. Back to the office for lunch, and then a meeting with experts on election law. After that, off to the Presidency building with Sir Martin Garrod, the Head of the OHR Office in Mostar, to press President Soljic and Vice President Ganic to get Mostar airport open. We want them to have agreed a way to do so by 12 February – otherwise we shall have to find a way to do it ourselves. There can be no excuse for any further delay. It is costing much needed money and jobs for Mostar and beyond.

Then back to the OHR to join Carlos Westendorp for a meeting with Bob Gelbard and Herman de Lange of the European Commission to complete final preparations for tomorrow's conference on returning refugees to Sarajevo.

Finally, off to dinner with Brian Attwood, the head of USAID in Washington and the head of USAID in Bosnia, Craig Buck, to discuss how best to provide aid to the new RS Government. To bed around midnight.

Tuesday 3 February

Morning meeting with Carlos Westendorp and colleagues. Then accompany Carlos Westendorp to the Sarajevo returns conference, being held at the Holiday Inn. We are determined to get real progress in returning pre-war, non- Bosniac refugees to Sarajevo this year – as a first step to getting returns right across the country, in from Brcko to Banja Luka, from Drvar to Central Bosnia. Carlos makes a strong speech to this effect, as does Bob Gelbard. I spend most of the day at the conference, listening to speeches by President Izetbegovic, President Zubak, PM Dodik and others. Also time for a meeting with Prime Minister Dodik, the first time I have met him. In the evening we hear that the flag design has narrowly failed to be adopted, although 16 voted for one of the three designs on offer and only one person voted against. Carlos Westendorp decides, rightly in my view, that enough time has been spent on this issue and that the time has come for the new flag to be introduced. He will announce this tomorrow. Finally, a meeting, together with Carlos, with the new British Minister for International development, Clare Short, before a reception at the British Embassy in her honour.

Wednesday 4 February

Spend most of the day arranging for the new flags to be flown to Nagano in Japan, in time for the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics, and to New York to be raised outside the UN Headquarters. It is especially important that the flag gets to Nagano on time, as this will provide an excellent platform for Bosnia on the world stage – a new flag for a new country with a great future. Getting it to Nagano from Sarajevo, however, turns out to be less than straightforward, and involves a trek taking in Vienna, Frankfurt, Tokyo and then, finally Nagano itself. An odyssey almost worthy of the Olympic flame! If the journey is complicated, getting a flag made quickly in Sarajevo turns out to be no problem at all. I see the flag maker at 10.00 and by lunchtime he has delivered the flag – fully made up – to my office.

Spend the afternoon arranging international assistance for training Bosnian diplomats and structuring the BiH Foreign Ministry.

Thursday 6 February

Early morning meeting with the Swiss Ambassador, followed by a meeting with the Croat National Council. Lunch at the ECMM HQ – a very smart building. Interview in the afternoon with the Washington Post, and then preparations for tomorrow's trip to Banja Luka.

Friday 6 February

Off to Banja Luka by helicopter for meetings with PM Dodik, President Plavsic, the new Minister of Information and the new Minister of Defence amongst others. My first trip to Banja Luka since the arrival of the new government, and I am much looking forward to it. But there is another, more practical reason for the trip – and that is formally to hand over nearly a million letters for the RS which have been held up in Sarajevo for almost two years. This is a real step forward. We have argued for months with the authorities in the RS; here is an example of the new government already making a difference in a practical way. What was argued about for months has now been resolved in a matter of days.

So Monday, license plates; Tuesday refugee return; Wednesday, a new flag; and Friday, delivering the post to Banja Luka. Not a bad week for peace and progress in Bosnia.