

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

| | Spokesperson | Topic |
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| OHR | Avis Benes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• OHR's comment on yesterday's session of FBiH House of Representatives• Concern over formation of the Canton 7 Government• OHR (S) on obligations of FBiH Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons |
| OSCE | Henning Phillipp | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Substantial completion of PLIP in Ljubuski |
| SFOR | Capt. Magistretti | |

Avis Benes - OHR:

Good morning ladies and gentlemen and welcome to yet another press conference of the international organizations based in Mostar.

On behalf of the OHR three points for you today.

The first one refers to the Federation level and yesterday's session of the FBiH House of Representatives which refused to adopt amendments to the Constitution by removing this point from the agenda as well as its position on the Civil Service. As far as amendments to the Constitution are concerned, it has to be clear that BiH's forward progress is at a speed set by its elected representatives, but no one will let BiH move backwards. It seems that FBiH Party Caucuses want to take the easy option, preferring to talk about constitutional change rather than the difficult business of reform. On the amendments to the FBiH Civil Service Agency Law, let me be clear, the IC is willing to support and give financial assistance to Civil Service reforms that represent an adoption of European standards. However, it is completely unclear why the International Community should be asked to pay for 11 Civil Service Agencies in the FBiH – nor why the citizens of the FBiH should be asked to do so either. The High Representative said this morning "BiH politicians have a choice; to go towards Europe or to go backwards; to work for jobs for their party members or jobs for the people". European Civil Service Agency reform means taking the patronage out of the political scene. It is clear that these amendments are not about cleaning up the political space but exactly the opposite. This statement is not available in writing yet, while the other two are.

Now, we will go back to the cantonal level. Deputy High Representative Ambassador Jean-Pierre Bercot is seriously concerned that the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton is the last government unit in the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina that is yet to put its government in place, which is clearly unacceptable. Instead of working on the reforms; economic and rule of law, that they promised in their election campaigns, reforms which would make a real difference to the lives of ordinary people, political parties are wasting their time in a nonsense of political wrangling, meanwhile people protest in the streets every week. OHR calls upon the political parties and their representatives at the negotiating table to act in a professional and constructive manner, and to agree finally on the government the citizens of this Canton deserve. Very importantly, the OHR (South) reminds all political parties that issues such as Deputy Prime Minister or Deputy Ministers positions, or increasing the number of the ministries are not open for discussion. The election results gained by political parties in the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton must be respected and fully implemented in this Canton. We do expect urgent and responsible action by the political parties and halt of the blockage by those who are doing so.

Thirdly, the OHR South would like to remind of the obligation of the Federation Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons. You have all probably seen report on audit which was carried out in this Ministry, which was published last week. Deputy High Representative and Head of our Office Ambassador Bercot is appalled by the findings of the audit. The audit was undertaken as the result of poor results of the ministry's reconstruction program. This poor performance can be particularly seen in the Mostar region. The audit has shown a complete lack of transparency and responsibility as well as unfulfilled promises to the beneficiaries themselves, which have had a detrimental effect on the most vulnerable community in BiH, refugees and the displaced. Ambassador Bercot is encouraged by the statements from the new Minister that this issue is being dealt with seriously and expects that the commitments made by the Ministry for the Mostar region will finally be honoured.

That is all on behalf of the OHR. Now, I would like to give the floor to Henning and OSCE. Welcome.

Henning Phillipp - OSCE

Good afternoon. I shall try to speak in a local language. One short point from the OSCE.

Ljubuski Municipality has substantially completed Property Law Implementation Plan [PLIP]. A total of 275 claims of repossession were filed with the municipality. 62 for socially owned apartment and 213 for private property. According to the PLIP statistics of February 2003, property law implementation in the municipality stood at 97%. The delay in the finalisation of the remaining cases is due to either the reluctance of owners to complete the process of repossession or long lasting Court procedures. The OSCE calls on those owners to take all necessary steps to finish the procedure in order to dispose over their property and have the opportunity to return should they choose to. OSCE FO Siroki Brijeg will continue to monitor the processing of these remaining claims.

Thank you.

Avis Benes - OHR:

Thank you. Now, let's hear SFOR and Capt. Magistretti.

Capt. Magistretti - SFOR:

Ladies and gentlemen good morning. I cannot speak the local language, probably at the end of my mandate.

We have just two points for you today.

Multinational Brigade South-East was involved yesterday in two operations which showed once more what its tasks are: ensuring safe and secure environment and to help people when it is needed. An important search operation was conducted yesterday at 06.00 am in the villages of Planice, Jarovici and Gradina near Rogatica. M48 rifles, AK 47 automatic rifles, carbines, hand grenades, rifle grenade, thousands of rifle ammunition, bayonets and kilograms of explosive have been found and seized. Now I will report you a quote by our Commander at the end of this search operation: "This shows that a huge amount of weapons is still in possession of some people who have no interest in bringing the peace to the country. But such individuals will have to face the mission of the SFOR soldiers."

The second issue I would like to draw your attention to is a story of solidarity. Nermina Jazvin, a 13 years old girl from Mostar, was operated at Kosevo Civil Hospital in Sarajevo. Nermina was committed to a wheelchair due to brain problems. The soldiers of Multinational Brigade, moved by her story, contributed to pay the operation costs. Her condition after the intervention is still under doctor's supervision.

Thank you.

Avis Benes - OHR:

Thank you. Our statements are available here except for the first OHR's statement. Your questions please.

Questions:

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): I have a question regarding the formation of the C7 Government. Namely, in yesterday's interview for our radio station, Mr. Coric stated that the main obstructionists of the Government formation are SDA members because of the position of Deputy Cantonal Prime Minister and two Ministries. President of the SDA Cantonal Board stated that this was not disputable, that it has already been agreed with the OHR to reduce the number of the Ministries once the Government is formed and that as far as the Deputy Prime Minister position is concerned it is in accordance with the agreement that was reached on Central Bosnia Canton. This has not been officially rejected by the OHR. What is disputable is a ministerial position for a Serb representative which HDZ allegedly wants to keep for itself even though there is a Serb caucus. One could get an impression that negotiations are very difficult, there are no results whatsoever and that they do not expect formation of the Cantonal Government any time soon. I would like to know if the OHR could do anything in order for these negotiations to go into the right direction and be completed and if you could confirm claims of the SDA?

A: Avis Benes: The question who is mostly profiting and in whose interest is the non-formation of the Government is the question that one should mostly wonder about. It is surely not in the interests of citizens and the International Community. However I shall leave this up to your assessments and investigations. As far as this issue is concerned, I think that our today's statement clearly reads that negotiations on the position of Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy Ministers are out of question. It is also clearly defined by the amendments to the Federation Constitution from the 6th of October 2002. In general at this point of time the OHR will not get into all details on negotiations. The parties are the ones who should be sufficiently mature and responsible to reach some sort of a solution. What the OHR is interested in is to really see respect of the election results. OHR and Ambassador Bercot are seriously concerned with the stalling of this process and herewith I would like to reiterate once again that too much time is being wasted. As for some concrete questions, they are quite clear from our statement today.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): Question for OHR. Last Monday we received a press release issued by the Federation Government informing that the Federation leaders, Mr. Hadzipasic and his Deputies met with Ambassador Bercot in Mostar. I got an impression that the OHR presented some sort of vision about the future reorganisation of Mostar and the High Representative said something about it last Friday. Could you inform the public as to what was presented at that meeting; I realised that they nicely agreed on everything so I would like to know what did they agree on?

A: Avis Benes: I can confirm that this meeting was held, but it was held in Sarajevo. The Federation Government issued a press release and therefore there was no need for duplication. As for the content of the meeting, it was basically very similar to the meeting that the HR Paddy Ashdown had in Mostar on Friday. The OHR gave some suggestions and certain encouragement for the establishment of the Commission for the work on the future organisation of Mostar. Proposals about grounds on which the Commission should be established were presented as well. The OHR issued a press release on this issue on Friday afternoon. If you have not received it we can provide you with it. In principle, the OHR encourages this process but the key issue is as the HR emphasised all the time is that city authorities along with the Cantonal and Federation should take full responsibility for this process. As the High Representative said this is a chance for Mostarians to decide for themselves about the future of their City and OHR is willing to help and assist in this important process. As for the meeting on Monday, the atmosphere was very constructive and positive. Head of our Office Ambassador Bercot welcomes the approach of the Federation Government to this problem.

Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X): I have a concrete question – when will the OHR announce its proposal for the organization of Mostar? Last Friday the High Representative said that the OHR has its own proposal. When will the public be informed about it?

A: Avis Benes: It could be that it was a misunderstanding. The only OHR proposals were related to the course of this process. There is no concrete proposal as such.

Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X): Does it mean that there is no concrete proposal of the OHR?

A: Avis Benes: This is exactly the task of the Commission for work on the future organization of Mostar and the reason for which it is being established.

Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X): Question for SFOR – could you tell us on which location you discovered the ammunition in Rogatica? Was anybody arrested? I believe you did not find it on the street.

A: Capt. Magistretti: For the moment nobody was arrested. At the moment I have no information about the precise place where the ammunition and weapons were stored. EUPM and the local police were also present. Nobody was arrested from our side. You can also ask them for the information.

Q: Senad Efica (RTV Mostar): I have a question for OSCE. In regards to the Hrnjicic case, OSCE expressed its concern with the press release issued by the Cantonal Ministry of Interior, and emphasised that nobody can draw conclusions before the completion of the investigation. A turnabout in this case happened last week when the Cantonal Prosecutor changed the qualification of this crime and announced it was an act of terrorism. In your opinion, will anybody bear responsibility for this, which you have warned about previously? Who was deceiving public in this case from the Ministry of Interior?

A: Henning Phillip: Now we have to wait for the completion of the investigation. We are confident that it will be

done in a proper way. We are closely following the investigation but before it is completed we will not give any further comment.

Q: Senad Efica (RTV Mostar): Could you comment on the position of the Cantonal Prosecutor that this was an act of terrorism?

A: Henning Phillipp: No, I would not like to comment.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): Question for SFOR – Police reported that huge quantity was discovered in the village of Hamzici near Citluk. Was SFOR involved in this action in any way? Police did not announce that anybody was arrested?

A: Capt. Magistretti: We did not have anything to do with that action.