

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR	Avis Benes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HR to visit Banja Luka• Bulldozer Committee presentation• EP BiH special audit• Latest PLIP statistics• Incident in Mostar• Unacceptable language of hatred by Mr. Jovicic
OSCE	Richard Medic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update on PLI in Jablanica• MA on MIFI graduation ceremony
SFOR	Capt. Magistretti	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MA on MNB SE Commander's press conference

Avis Benes - OHR:

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

Before I proceed with the two issues on behalf of the OHR for today, I would like to remind you of few technical details.

As you know, the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown is visiting Banja Luka today. You will be able to hear more about it after the visit.

Also, Representatives of the Bulldozer Committee will present the 50 recommendations drawn up by the Committee to a special joint session of the BiH governments today.

Results of the special report on the special audit of Elektroprivreda BiH will be presented to public tomorrow.

Let me also remind you of yesterday's press release issued by the organizations that are dealing with the implementation of property laws. As you may know, the average rate throughout the country stands at 74%, 80% in the Federation and 67% in the RS. A remark noted by the PLIP representatives is that the PLIP statistics show that slower rates of implementation often occur in the larger towns. This is particularly noticeable in the RS, with centres such as Bijeljina, Zvornik and Banja Luka where the implementation average rate is even 15%-20% less than the entity average. When it comes to the Federation, for the poorer results in the property law implementation Sarajevo municipalities Hadzici, Ilijas and Centar were singled out. I am glad to report that Mostar municipalities and urban zone are not lagging behind the Federation average, they are above or around it depending on the municipality. The average of the whole Canton is above the Federation. We have prepared statistics here so that you can see yourself. Just to remind you once again that these statistics are also available on our website.

Now, two brief issues the OHR is going to mention today refer to the incident in Mostar and unacceptable language of hatred.

As for the first topic, unfortunately, OHR (S) has to again express its concern over another incidents in the Mostar area. The latest incident in Bacevici, on 7 March 2003, when a Serb returnee was injured, as well as continuous explosions in the City of Mostar should be a matter of the utmost concern for all authorities, especially Ministry of Interior. OHR (S) urges most thorough and prompt investigation, which will bring concrete results.

Secondly, Deputy High Representative and Ambassador Jean-Pierre Berçot is very unpleasantly surprised by the public language of hatred displayed by Mr. Milan Jovicic in Dnevni list edition of 11 March 2003 and he finds it unacceptable. Mr. Jovicic has naturally every right to react to articles and make his opinions public. However, such an intolerant vocabulary is not compatible with the position of Mostar City Council Vice Speaker, which Mr.

Jovicic holds at the moment. Moreover, Mr. Jovicic is also an official who is supposed to represent all citizens of Mostar. He has to choose whether he wants to do so in a responsible manner or simply spread hatred. In sum, this manner of inflammatory public communication cannot in any way contribute to the process of reconciliation and re-unification of the City. Ambassador Berçot expects that in his future statements, Mr. Jovicic will act with more responsibility and tolerance, in accordance with a position he holds.

That this all on behalf of the OHR. Now, I give the floor to Richard and OSCE.

Richard Medic - OSCE

Just one media advisory from the OSCE today but before I mention that it is good to see that Jablanica municipality property law implementation rate has jumped from 75% to 90%. I would just like to remind you that last year the international PLIP agencies urged the housing authorities to solve claims in a chronological order -expect in cases foreseen by the law – and to respect legal deadlines to enforce decisions even if alternative accommodation is not provided. This is the so-called New Strategic Direction. So Jablanica municipality has taken on board the main principles of NSD by instigating a concrete plan of action which applies chronological processing of claims, as well as the review and enforcement of 90 day decisions, the status of collective centre residents, and the use of unclaimed apartments as alternative accommodation.

Just a short media advisory. Tomorrow, Ljubuski and Jablanica Municipalities will receive a “Certificate of Recognition” for having completed OSCE’s Municipal Infrastructure Finance and Implementation Project. The Certificates will be awarded at a ceremony to be attended by the mayors and speakers of other municipalities currently participating in the MIFI Project, Capljina, Gacko, Trebinje, and Konjic. The ceremony will also welcome two new municipalities to the Project – Citluk and Prozor-Rama. We invite the media to the MIFI Graduation Ceremony and press opportunity beginning at 11.30 tomorrow on 13 March 2003, at Hotel Bevanda, Stara Ilicka.

That is all from OSCE today.

Avis Benes - OHR:

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

Capt. Magistretti - MNB SE:

Ladies and gentlemen good morning. I would like just to address you with few words, i.e. to invite you to the press conference which will be held by the MNB SE Commander Brigadier General Jean Marco Chiarrini on Thursday, tomorrow here at 10 o’clock. MNB SE Commander will first say few words about himself and after his address media representatives will have the opportunity to pose him some questions.

Thank you.

Avis Benes - OHR:

So, we shall see each other tomorrow again at the premises of the OHR. But before that, your questions please.

Questions:

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): You were referring to some PLIP statistics. I would like to know if you have information on whether the repossession of property is followed by the actual return of people to their property?

A: Avis Benes: Unfortunately it is not a part of the mandate. Namely, the focus of these organizations is that all claimants repossess their property. We, of course, know that not all of them return, some of them decide to sell their property and it can be surely said that these rates of the implementation of property laws are not equal to the ratio of return of people. However, there are no concrete data.

Q: Zvonimir Jukic (Onasa): The recent developments at the Mostar City Council session and C7 Government session are showing that the leading coalition in this city and the Canton is in crisis. According to some unofficial sources of information, the OHR is making efforts at various meetings in order to overcome this situation. Could you tell us what the direction of these efforts is and when will it come to an end?

A: Avis Benes: Thank you for your question. OHR is surely carefully monitoring the situation and is interested that the Cantonal Government is established as soon as possible and that situation in the City Council is stabilised in terms of election of a new Deputy Mayor. Unfortunately, it seems that this Canton is again going to be among the last ones, if not the last one, to establish a Government. We are of the opinion that leaders i.e. those responsible for this situation must intensify their efforts. As I said, the OHR would like to see a new Deputy Mayor assuming this post as soon as possible which would be in the interest of all citizens. However, who that person is going to be is a matter of political agreement. As you are very well aware, it is the matter to be dealt with by the Election Commission and as I said last time the OHR is not carrying out a vetting process nor giving approval for this post. Also, the OHR hopes that meetings, which are ongoing today at the level of the City Administration and the City Council, will contribute to the constructive resolution of this issue.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): Avis, I would be happier to pose this question to Mr. Bercot but in his absence I shall ask you. Do you not think that it seems that the principle condemnation of Mr. Jovicic's statement was too mild? In his appearance, Mr. Jovicic slammed the entire journalist community in this city, which is trying to be professional. People were removed, media were shut down or deprived of a broadcasting licence for much more benign cases than this one. Actually, I would like to know if Mr. Bercot is perhaps afraid of being objected to for application of double standards?

A: Avis Benes: Thank you for your question. We could get into discussion on examples you mentioned of less or more benign cases and which actions were taken in the past. However, we are not going to start discussion on that. In any case, Ambassador Bercot has clearly demonstrated including today's statement that he really takes this sort of public communication very seriously. I think that the public warning to Mr. Jovicic to be much more careful in considering the way to act in the future, with much more responsibility and tolerance also speaks about the seriousness of our reaction, i.e. reaction of Ambassador Bercot. There are no double standards. The OHR would have reacted in the same manner if someone else who holds the important position such as Mr. Jovicic would have said something like this.

Q: Vesna Leto (Dnevni List): I would like to follow up on Pejo's question. If anyone was doubting the existence of the letter, here it is signed by Mr. Jovicic. In my opinion, this letter was not addressed to *Dnevni List* solely. If I understood correctly he spitted on one nation.

A: Avis Benes: Is there a question?

Q: Vesna Leto (Dnevni List): Yes. Apart from apologising on behalf of Mr. Jovicic what concrete steps are you going to take? I refer to your statement as an apology for Mr. Jovicic, I cannot understand it in a different way.

A: Avis Benes: First of all, I think that it is clear to everyone who heard our statement that this is not any kind of apology but condemnation of such behaviour and the wording of Mr. Jovicic. As for the actions, the statement of the OHR itself on this issue is action. As for other kinds of actions, it cannot be talked about at this very moment. I hope that all journalists are aware as to what concrete text we are talking about right now?! If not, we can provide you with a copy.

Q: Senada Malanovic (RTV Mostar): I would like to ask both the OHR and the OSCE representative to comment on yesterday's session of the Cantonal Government and support that the Government gave to the Cantonal Ministry of Interior. We have been informed today that a criminal charge has been pressed against unknown perpetrators in the Hrnjicic case, which is in contradiction with yesterday's statement when they said they have no evidence whatsoever that this case can be classed as terrorism.

A: Avis Benes: As for the second question, you obviously have more information about that at this very moment and therefore I cannot comment on that. As for the Government session, the positive fact is that this issue was discussed even though perhaps it should have been talked about long ago. However, what will surely prove commitment of both the Government and the MoI and their decisiveness to resolve this situation are – concrete results.

A: Richard Medic: I'll just add that OSCE also welcomes the fact that the Cantonal Government is addressing the security issue. And to follow up on our statement last week I can add that we particularly welcome the fact that the conclusion was put forward [at the C7 Government session] that 'all individuals and institutions should refrain from giving statements unless they have firm facts and arguments'. I think any further comment on the security issue in the Canton should be directed to the EUPM.

Q: Zvonimir Jukic (Onasa): I have a question concerning the responsibility of politicians. Namely, the High Representative stated that he would be promoting the principle of responsibility of public officials. The fact is that as of recently there have been a series of irresponsible statements by local politicians, cantonal officials etc. in Mostar. Each one of them in its own way did incite intolerance. You are aware of the statements of Zijad Hadziomerovic a few months ago; then Minister Bilic; now Mr. Jovicic and President of the City Council Mr. Vidacak whose statement was not that strong. Do you have any strategy apart from partial evaluations to act against this kind of behaviour before it gets out of control. This question is not only for the OHR but the OSCE as well, since last time they made a statement regarding the MoI press release.

A: Avis Benes: You are right, politicians and officials must understand that they have an additional responsibility in their public appearance in comparison to those who are not performing political and public posts. It is difficult to expect from the OHR to react to all statements but also the public as such as its own obligation to point out and react to the statements of this kind. In the end of the day, statements are noted and they are a kind of mirror of the persons giving them. At this moment this would be all on behalf of the OHR on this matter.

A: Richard Medic: The only thing I'll add is that OSCE urges local authorities not to politicise security issues. That is all I have to say.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): I have a question for Capt. Magistretti. It has been a week since the new MNB SE Commander arrived. Could you tell us if your HQ received any special instruction over the last week from the Hague, Brussels or Sarajevo regarding the Montenegro border with BIH as it is presumed that Karadzic is hiding in that region?

A: Capt. Magistretti: I hope you will have the opportunity to address this question to my Commander during tomorrow's press conference. Please, come tomorrow.

Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X): Avis, in regards to yesterday's session of the City Council – has the OHR since then met with the Clubs of political parties represented in the City Council? It seems to me that as of yesterday apart from the Canton we have a crisis in the city authorities as well.

A: Avis Benes: No, the OHR did not have meetings with the Clubs of councillors of the City Council. As far as we know, some meeting of City officials was supposed to be held today at which certain results are expected to be achieved. We are of the opinion that if the issue can be resolved with the local representatives of the authority that it should be primarily resolved by them.

Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X): Yesterday we heard from Mr. Vidacak that candidacy of Mr. Ljubo Beslic was approved by the OHR. Is that correct?

A: Avis Benes: I am glad you posed that question. When I said that the OHR is not carrying out a vetting procedure for this post I believed that it was clear. The OHR neither approved nor rejected anybody. That statement you have mentioned was not an accurate statement.