

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR	Avis Benes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High Representative Press Conference on VAT and Customs Reform Commission• OHR concerned over Elektroprivredas practice in cutting of the electricity power supply• OHR welcomes transfer of authority over airport to the City of Mostar• Latest PLIP statistics
OSCE	Richard Medic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• OSCE to conduct orientation workshop for cantonal assembly delegates
SFOR	Maj. Fix	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No statement

Avis Benes - OHR:

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

Central event for the OHR today is taking place in Sarajevo as you already been informed. The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, will hold a press conference at 12.15 hrs to announce the establishment of a Commission which will take forward customs and VAT reform, and the principles and remit that will govern the Commission's work. Let me reiterate once again that this press conference is taking place at 1215 hrs so that you can follow on reports about it. If some of you are particularly interested in this topic, we have prepared here for you a copy of the article written by Principal Deputy High Representative Ambassador Donald Hays for yesterday's edition of *Blic* magazine, in which he explains in details the real truth about some misinformation that appeared on this issue particularly in the media of Republika Srpska.

Now, I'll proceed with two issues that the OHR wants to mention today.

The first issue regards OHR concern over Elektroprivredas practice in cutting of the electricity power supply, very often mostly affecting socially most endangered categories. Both statements will be available in writing.

OHR expresses his concern over the issue of cutting off the electricity power supply by Elektroprivreda BiH and Elektroprivreda Herceg-Bosne in cases when this should not be allowed, the issue to which Ombudsman's office already warned about. According to the FBiH regulations, consumers are naturally obliged to pay their fees, however, their electricity cannot be switched off on the basis of debts older than one year. These debts are falling under category of expired debts. What is also of particular concern is that cutting off the electricity as well as writing off of debts is applied in a rather arbitrary fashion and frequently in a non-consistent manner, very often mostly affecting socially most endangered categories and returnees. Finally, both Elektroprivredas are obliged to provide all citizens the listing of debts to their requests which is not always the case. It is to be hoped that they will stop with this discriminating and after all illegal practice.

Secondly, the OHR welcomes the latest decision of the Mostar City Council that the City of Mostar is to take over the competencies over the Mostar Airport from the City municipalities with Croat majority, this also being one of provisions of the Interim Statute (Art.7 and 64). OHR has been following and coordinating this matter closely and it is pleased that this step has finally been made. We expect that this trend of strengthening the City institutions and City authority will continue.

One more brief point. Yesterday, you received the press release and the recent PLIP statistics, something that I spoke about at the last press conference. If it was difficult for you to download it from the website we have prepared them for you. As for our AoR, we can say that these are not the most critical areas that are being warned about where the process of implementation of property laws should be drastically improved.

That's is all on behalf of OHR. Now I give the floor to Richard and OSCE.

Richard Medic - OSCE

Just one very short point from OSCE today. It is a media advisory.

Within the scope of its Canton Administration Project (CAP) and ongoing efforts to strengthen the work of cantonal legislative authorities, OSCE is conducting an Orientation Workshop for the new delegates of the Canton 7 and 8 Assemblies. The seminar, which is to be held on Tuesday, 18 February, will focus participants' attention on the roles and responsibilities of Canton Assembly delegates. Topics to be covered include the efficient functioning of cantonal assemblies, the work of commissions within the assemblies, the relations between executive and legislative authorities, as well as delegates' relations with the constituencies they represent. A media advisory will be issued before the event.

That's all I have from OSCE today.

Avis Benes - OHR

Thank you Richard. On behalf of SFOR Maj. Fix.

Maj. Fix - SFOR:

I have no statement for today.

Questions:

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): In the explanation of his resignation, former Deputy Mayor of Mostar Neven Tomic among other things criticised the International Community for resolving only individual cases as he phrased it. You probably heard the speech. Among others, he emphasized that instead of strengthening of the City Administration and its competencies what was strengthened were competencies of the six city municipalities as six small feudal units. These are his observations. I would like to hear your comment on this.

A: Avis Benes: OHR is of the position that the contribution of Mr. Tomic in the process of unification and normalization of the city is really large and significant and we regret his decision. The OHR and Mr. Tomic used to have and hopefully still have the same joint goal which are integration processes and strengthening of the rule of law in the City of Mostar as well as strengthening of the City institutions. The latest decision we mentioned today is going into that direction, which is a right one. In general however, the OHR is of the opinion that the main stimulus going towards making changes and decision-making processes should come from Mostar citizens and primarily from those who are elected to do so - City Council and the City Administration. This is exactly something that the High Representative emphasized during his last visit to Mostar.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): If one is to trust the claims of Mr. Tomic, the work of the City Council and City Administration was completely prevented in many cases. Certain decisions are being made which cannot be implemented in the field because of the statutes of the city municipalities, as Mr. Tomic mentioned, while the IC not so rarely gave its blessings to this.

Q: Avis Benes: I can only reiterate that all of our decisions and our efforts are going in the direction that we already mentioned, direction of strengthening of the city institutions. Of course, there are many things which are not satisfying and there is a space where progress should be made in terms of the actions of both the City Administration and the City Council. In any case, the goal of the OHR is not straightening of the authority of city municipalities. But I think that is very well known.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): I would like to follow up on Tina's questions from two aspects. Firstly, who do you expect as Tomic's successor, I do not ask you to name a person but from which political profile? Secondly, more importantly, it was announced that one of the political parties, in this case concretely the Party for BiH, submitted its proposal on the unification of Mostar to the OHR. The answer was that this document was in the process of translation. According to some information, other parties such as SDA, SDP and Radom za boljitak submitted their proposals as well. At least this is what they claim. My questions are - what do you think of the

Party for BIH proposal and what do the proposals of other parties talk about?

A: Avis Benes: Answer to your first question is that we do not have any special expectations regarding certain person or an individual candidate. It is an issue of parties' agreement. However, it should be a person with similar vision that Mr. Tomic has, i.e. a vision of normal and unified city of Mostar and a person who will be a real Deputy Mayor of the entire city.

As for your second question perhaps a little misunderstanding occurred last time. True, the document was not translated at that time but what was supposed to be emphasized and what I am going to emphasize now is the fact that OHR is not going to comment separately on each proposal. Instead of continuing OHR's comments we believe that it is important that there is a public discussion, public debate about these issues which are of the essential importance for the city of Mostar and that parties publicly present their proposals. As I mentioned last time, we are grateful to the Party for BIH for the proposals that it submitted. When you mentioned these three parties that allegedly submitted their proposals to our office, concluding with the last night they did not arrive to our office; could have only perhaps in the meantime.

Q: Zvonimir Jukic (FTV/Onasa): First question I have is about the rotation of Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Mostar. [non-understandable] As far as I know the rotation was supposed to be held on the 9th of February?

Secondly, when the OHR was seated in the Ero Hotel there was a lot of talk about the ownership of that Hotel. I would like to know who is the owner of this building and was he involved in illegal construction works before?

Q: Fazlija Hebibovic (Nezavisne Novine): Avis, allow me a question related to this one. I would like to know why did OHR give up on the agreement with the Old Town municipality on construction of the new building close to the Railway Station? Is it correct that a monthly rent you pay for this building is 56,000 KM?

A: Avis Benes: As far as I know the owner of this building is Mr. Durakovic. I do not have information at this moment that there were some illegal construction works that he was involved in.

Q: Zvonimir Jukic (FTV/Onasa): Who was constructing at the Pharmacy site?

A: Avis Benes: I said I do not have information at this moment which does not mean that it is not the case. At this moment I do not have it. It should be checked.

As for the question of Mr. Hebibovic, it is true that there was a proposal on construction of a new building. However in accordance with cut of the OHR expenditures, i.e. reduction of staff and all other costs in general, as well as streamlining, we have given up that proposal.

As for the amount of the rent we pay, it is a matter of professional discretion.

As for the issue of rotation, I think you should rather approach the City Council and the City Administration for an answer.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): Question for Mr. Medic since the name of your organization contains the term 'security.' We could hear completely opposing opinions regarding the Iraq crisis. Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivanic support Americans, Tihic is against and Covic is warning of the security consequences. Can we hear OSCE's position if there is one regarding the eventual attacks on Iraq and consequences on Bosnia?

A: Richard Medic: I have to say that it is not the role of the OSCE to dictate foreign policy in BIH nor is it our policy to have a public stance on issues such as an impending attack on Iraq. So I think any future questions about that should be directed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Defense.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): There is something unclear to me. [non-understandable] Namely, story about the Interim Statute is in the middle of attention again as well as the story about reorganization of Mostar, new solutions for this city, etc. Are there certain deadlines set by the IC until when these platforms have to be presented? How long shall we wait that something is presented in the public?

A: Avis Benes: As far as I know there is a lot of talks about platforms in public. There should be perhaps more talks about certain solutions and details. However, on the side of the International Community there are no deadlines set. There is only a perception, and I believe it is a joint perception of the International Community and

political protagonists in the City, that the Interim Statute as such cannot be preserved forever.