

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR	Avis Benes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PLIP• OHR position on waste disposal issue
OSCE	Henning Philipp	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PLIP• Citizen-voters and OSCE
SFOR	Maj. De Lambert	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Dindol project• Division re-structuring

Avis Benes - OHR

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the press conference of the International Organisations seated in Mostar.

Today, on behalf of the OHR I have two items.

The first item is just a reminder of something that OSCE is going to elaborate later on. It refers to the New Strategic Direction in the property laws implementation, which was talked about at yesterday's press conference of the international organisations in Sarajevo. As you know, there was a one-month deadline given to all those involved in the property laws implementation to get familiar with this new or better to say intensified activity in the implementation of the property laws by the International Organisations. As a reminder, we have brought to you today the copies of the press release issued at that time the Strategy was developed. As I said, OSCE will elaborate on this but what I would like to inform you on is that all the municipalities in our AoR have been informed about this plan over the last month by the OHR and other International Organisations. In any case, the framework plan is to fully implement the property laws by the end of the next year. Should you have any further questions about this topic, please do not hesitate to call us.

My second issue pertains to the position of the OHR South on Mostar waste disposal issue. This statement will be available in writing and there is no need for translation.

On 10 October 2002, Deputy High Representative, Ambassador Jean-Pierre Bercot, sent a letter to the Heads of Mostar City-municipalities, Mayor and Deputy Mayor of City of Mostar and Public companies "Komos" and "Parkovi" in relation to the issue of unacceptable random waste disposal in Mostar. Ambassador Bercot expressed his concern over this long-lasting problem and pointed out the urgent need to halt this practice in order to prevent the further deterioration of this already serious environmental disaster, which also presents a threat to health and well-being of all citizens. Deputy High Representative Bercot suggested that, until a permanent solution is defined within the project carried out with the World Bank, this issue should be solved on commercial basis in the form of the arrangement between the company managing the waste dump and companies collecting and transporting the garbage. Moreover, OHR (South) recommended that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor should be in charge of implementation of this matter in cooperation with Heads of City-municipalities and that the action should commence immediately. Aware that some serious talks and even steps have already taken place, OHR (South) is encouraging all parties involved to show good will, cooperation and healthy vision for the future of all citizens of Mostar.

Thank you.

Henning Philipp - OSCE

Good morning everybody. Just to make clear that my first name is Henning and Philipp is the family name. I just mentioned it because it is always mixed up in the media also.

I would like to add few remarks on the issue already touched by Avis – the property law implementation programme. Around 110,000 claimants all over BiH are still denied their property rights. This is mainly because the local authorities are enforcing the laws selectively and not always providing enough alternative accommodation. Rights of temporary occupants shall not prevent claimants from repossessing their homes. On September 12 the PLIP agencies, OHR, UNHCR, UNMIBH CRPC and OSCE, introduced the New Strategic Direction. It means that after the 15 October, that was yesterday, the failure of the authorities to provide alternative accommodation will no longer be tolerated. The International Community has already indicated sources of alternative accommodation to the authorities and they need to act on that now. All evictions must be carried out in strict accordance with legal deadlines, authorities cannot hide behind their failures to provide alternative accommodation.

And on another note I would like to make some remarks on the politics on municipal level. The OSCE is committed to strengthening and intensifying democratic participation of citizens in local politics. The most important element of a functioning democracy is the active, involved citizen-voter. The citizen-voters in a democracy decide what they want done to make their lives better e.g. efficient, regular garbage collection, as just pointed out by Avis referring to this municipality, safe water, serious attack on drug trade, etc. The electorate lives with the results of government inaction. They are the ones most effected and therefore the ones with the greatest interest in forcing change. Citizen-voters must press their agenda on their elected officials. If they do not, their democracy will remain dysfunctional. In the coming months OSCE will increase and intensify its work with existing citizens special interest groups and assist in establishing new ones throughout our region. Our expert advisers will work with them to strengthen and professionalize their lobbying campaigns in support of their legitimate agendas. Citizen-voters are the engine of democracy.

Thank you.

Major De Lambert

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I have two short statements this morning – one concerning a project and one concerning the Division restructuring.

Dindol bridge was destroyed in autumn 1995. UNHCR Mostar Office noticed the importance of the bridge in this area and initiated its reconstruction. MNDSE took the responsibility to answer UNHCR request and started this project. First step was to make the access roads to Konjic and Kalinovik trafficable. This was performed by the Spanish engineer company of MNDSE. An inspection of the destroyed bridge proofed that reinforcement of the pillars and reconstruction of the abutment would be necessary before a military Bailey bridge could be launched over a 56 meters wide gap. The concrete works – reinforcement of the pillars and abutment were done by a local construction enterprise (Hering d.o.o.) with Mr. Mario Jurisic as a project manager. This part of the project was financed by European Union. Finally the last two weeks Spanish engineers again constructed and launched the military Bailey bridge. The inauguration and transfer of the bridge to the responsibility of municipality of Konjic will take place on 22nd of October 2002 at 1200 hrs on the very place. The IC is kindly invited and several Ambassadors already answered that they will attend this ceremony. Also, all media representatives are kindly invited to attend this event.

Let's go now to the restructuring issue. Like the other SFOR components, MNDSE is on the way to reorganise its structure. The reasons SFOR is restructuring are referring to the overall situation in BiH and have a goal to enable local authorities to perform their duties. The first restructuring phase was to hand over of the responsibility of Ploce harbour to Croatia and that had been done in July 2002. The second phase is to close and reorganise the Army Aviation Battalion in Ploce. This will be done on the 31st of October. The third phase is undergoing now and is focused on decreasing of our strength in BiH, meanwhile we will keep enough means to ensure safe and secure environment. Dynamic response 02 and such exercise confirm our capability to face any situation in a short notice. That is why a reserve unit always remains under pressure. French contingent currently leader in charge of all support issues will share its tasks with other nations committed in the future Brigade area of responsibility. The contribution nations will remain the same: France, Germany; Spain, Italy. SFOR will continue to perform its duties with the same energy, professionalism and efficiency.

Thank you.

Questions and Answers:

Q: Vlatko Menix (HTV Mostar): Question for Mr. Philipp and Ms. Benes. Could you please, through an explanation of allocation of compensatory mandates, tell us to what extent it will influence the final counting and formation of the authority?

A: Avis Benes: I'll be brief on behalf of the OHR – for all these speculations and scenarios about the compensatory mandates we should wait for the decision of the Election Commission. We fully respect their authority on this matter.

A: Henning Philipp: I would like to add that it is totally under the jurisdiction of the BiH Election Commission. The Election Commission will calculate the compensatory mandates according to the BiH Election Law. They have already last April issued a clarification how exactly this is supposed to be done.

A: Avis Benes: You might want to check respective press release from the 12th of April.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): Question for Maj. De Lambert. Could you tell us if the restructuring of SFOR troops in BiH and parts of Croatia that you previously described is connected to the potential attacks on Iraq?

A: Maj. De Lambert: There is absolutely no connection. The restructuring has been planned for maybe one or two years. It is a normal way and there is absolutely no connection.

Q: Silvia Vrbanić (HTV Mostar): Could you give us the numbers, i.e. how many soldiers will remain after the restructuring?

A: Maj. De Lambert: I can only tell you that regarding the Division here, there are currently around 5.500 and this will decrease to 3.500.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): Question for OSCE – there has been a lot of talks about the reform of education. Taking into consideration that OSCE is in charge of this issue, I would like to ask what has been done in this Canton so far?

A: Henning Philipp: Our education reform activities are covering the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Right now the six working groups that have been established have come up with the initial reports and the strategy for the reform of education. Results of the work of these groups will be presented to the Peace Implementation Council on 21 of November. And afterwards we'll try to implement the results very soon so that we see the first results of the education reform already next year.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): Additional question – do you happen to know if one of these groups is working on the joint curriculum?

A: Henning Philipp: There is one working group which is dealing with the curricula. And the other working groups are dealing with the reform of primary school education, secondary school education, University education, reform of teachers' education. The important work is also being dealt with by one working group – financing.

Q: Ivan Baković (HTV Mostar): Question and reminder of a question for Ms. Benes. After yesterday's decision of the High Representative it remained unclear what are the criteria on the basis of which the High Representative declared protected groups of citizens in BiH. Which are the criteria for their eventual removal or dismissal? After the last election people were appointed or dismissed on the basis of political affiliation. As for their capability, obviously they were not successful over the last two years otherwise they would not have lost elections.

Secondly, regarding my question from last Wednesday you promised me an answer but I have not heard anything until now.

A: Avis Benes: As for your second question – yes, there was a letter. However, involvement of the OHR is absolutely in accordance with the work of the Constitutional Court which can be checked at the Constitutional Court.

As for your first question regarding appointments, dismissals, removals of people in public services what is important is the following principle – political affiliation should not be dominant anymore but capability and professionalism. In general a civic public service should be strengthened, the concept of which has been pretty unknown until now. At this point of time, we cannot discuss individual positions that you are referring to in detail. In any case, once we have a clear example of the abuse of political patronage, the High Representative will be in a position to intervene. Another key issue is the establishment of the Civil Service Agency, which should start functioning by the end of this year. Additional thing is that there is no Law on the civil service in the Federation unlike in the RS and the state level. However, it should be passed in due time. The Federation Government obliged itself that this will be one of the laws which will be passed as one of the rule of law targets.

Q: Ivan Bakovic (HTV Mostar): Before the formation of a new Government?

A: Avis Benes: I cannot tell you exactly when.

Q: Ivan Bakovic (HTV Mostar): Which Government committed itself to this obligation?

A: Avis Benes: The existing one. However, it is clear that the new Government should honour the obligations of the former Government especially when it comes to issues which are of such importance.