

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

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Avis Benes - OHR

Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon. Welcome to the press conference of the international organisations seated in Mostar. I am happy to welcome today Ambassador Jean-Pierre Bercot, Head of our Office and Deputy High Representative who will convey a message to all of you.

Jean-Pierre Bercot - OHR

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Today I have just one important matter for you. It is related to the forthcoming Saturday and Election Day. I would like to remind all of you one more time on the extreme importance that results of these elections will have for all the citizens of this country. On 5th October you will elect your representatives for various levels for four years. During these four years the future of your region, country and children will be decided. This future should and must be decided directly by you, citizens of BiH and this can be only done if you get out and vote. Every voter will naturally decide of his/her own free will about his/her choice. Our message is simple: think about those who are supposed to lead your country to the next periods. Those who will head towards European and reformist future or ghosts from the past. The process of reforms needs to be increased if BiH is to catch up with other countries of the region and this can be done only by those who have the capability and vision of reforms. They will be your choice. In front of you there is an agenda for reform agreed between the Government of BiH and the IC on the issues of jobs and justice. Please, really please look at it thoroughly. It is basically an agreement and commitment for the future. Commitment to the citizens of BiH which must be fulfilled since there is no alternative to employment, prosperity and rule of law. Whoever is elected must not forget that you are the ones deciding on 5th October on their position. In general, the IC will work with all those who are going to work for the benefit of BiH in democratic, peaceful and legalistic manner. Another thing, whomever you give your vote please do not forget to hold them accountable afterwards. Politicians are here to serve you, the well-being of this country and its citizens not the other way around. And politicians often have a tendency to forget that. On these elections you again have an opportunity to remind them what you want. You surely do not want situation of disfunctional Government, social crisis, constant strikes and politicians who are always blaming somebody else and not accepting responsibility. Unfortunately in this Canton we are witnessing such situation and I will openly say citizens deserve more and better. Moreover, at your disposal you have the system of open lists for Parliaments and Cantonal Assemblies. So that you have the possibility to directly vote for some candidates and not to be stuck with the selection the parties have already made for you. Many politicians are hiding behind parties logos and slogans, and are often afraid of judgement of the people on their performance. The open list system is used in a limited number of countries, BiH being one of them. On 5th October you can make a choice and distinction not only between the parties but also between the candidates within one party or party block. And you should exercise this opportunity and this right to the fullest. Choose your representatives with your rights, this is your strongest power. Once again my message is: vote and vote for the better future. Nobody can remain passive when it comes to such an important issue. Thank you for your attention.

Avis Benes:

Today we shall slightly change the usual structure of the press conference since the Ambassador has important business to attend afterwards. We shall take two or three of your questions if there are any and proceed with the

regular course of the press conference. Could you please state your name and media agency you work for since the Ambassador is not familiar with all of you.

Questions:

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): Ambassador Bercot, could you please answer my following question: according to results of some polls the boycott of voters could reach up to 70% in some parts of BiH. If this happens does it mean that the election results will not be verified or that they will be annulled?

A: Ambassador Bercot: Thank you very much for this question. I have to answer in two levels. First of it, we have a rule which is to never believe polls or results and as French I know what happened during the last elections in France. Polls and speculation on results were totally, totally wrong. This was the first part of my answer. The second part of my answer is that I do not want to speculate on the results because if I am speculating on the validity of the result I am entering in a kind of sphere to accept that we shall have a lot of abstinence which will not be the case.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): Mr. Bercot, as I understood from your statement you called upon citizens to get out and vote. Since you did that could you, as the leading official of the international community in this region, evaluate pre-election campaigns of the political parties taking into consideration the interference of, for instance, religious communities and other things that I do not want to go into details now. I shall mention just one example – a tear gas was used at last night's rally of a certain coalition. Thank you very much.

A: Ambassador Bercot: Thank you. I do not want to focus on smears and scandals and this will only bring politicians into disrepute and lower turnout. This is my position and I do not want to focus on that. It is good in a democracy that people have to give their own opinion whoever they are, coming from trade unions, religious communities and so on but the main thing that I want people to vote and it is the role of politicians to talk about this different issues. And they have to occupy the field and the ground on these specific issues. It is quite normal that all members of the society have to speak out about their own opinion about this campaign. But it is the politicians who have to be elected. They are the ones who have to cope with these issues and they are the ones who have to deal with that.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): At yesterday press conference of HDZ BiH, representatives of this party accused the international community that "while promoting reforms the IC is subjectively emphasizing that the reforms can be brought only by the Alliance." Could you comment on this?

A: Ambassador Bercot: First of all, about all the comments coming from other parties or all parties in BiH regarding the role of the IC – I do not have a comment on it. I do not have to comment on the comments. As I said before, we are not here to support individual politicians or parties. This is your choice, it is not our choice and we have not directed you or told you who to vote for. And we are much interested in the reforms and the actions than in comments of different parties. The only thing that I can say at this stage is that the IC will work with whoever is coming with the reforms and we need reforms. And it is only those who want to make reforms will be the one with who we shall work.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): I have a question related to the previous one. How would you then comment on the appearance that Ambassadors of certain countries residing in BiH are meeting with representatives of only certain political parties?

A: Ambassador Bercot: I am very sorry but I am not here as representative of one country. I am not Ambassador of one country. I am a member of the chain of command and a member of the link of the IC. So if you want to have some answers about your question or your issue pose that to the bilateral Ambassadors. They are allowed to say whatever they have to say about the view of their own country regarding BiH. Myself, as OHR member, I am representing the IC in this institution. So my personal point of view is exactly the official point of view of the OHR. And you perfectly know what is the point of view of the OHR on this matter.

Q: Zoran Kresic (Croat Radio Herceg Bosna): Does the IC have its favourites among the political parties? Could you please answer as concrete as possible.

A: Ambassador Bercot: You have your favourite, all of you here have your favourite. It is normal, it is

democracy. How can you ask one organization or the IC to say what is our favourite before the elections? It is not acceptable by the fact that we are not to interfere into the procedure and process of the elections. This is your will, your country and your choice which has to be respected by all of us. But after the elections, it will be our role to work with people that you will elect. And at that moment be sure that we shall give our position and our feeling about the work that we have to do with these people. And I can make one other example from my country – as French I shall never accept that even a Head of state in one other country could say that he prefer to have this candidate over the other candidate. And the only one answer to this kind of question to the other people who are not the voters is to tell them mind their own business. If I were a voter, I could say what is my preference. But I am not a voter. And it would be totally unfair from the IC to say who we prefer over the others. You are the ones to decide – voters. Thank you ladies and gentlemen and see you after elections.

Avis Benes - OHR:

So we continue with the press conference. On behalf of the OHR one more thing of a logistic nature. It refers to today's visit of Deputy High Representative Bernard Fassier to Herzegovina. He is at Radio Rama at the moment. His itinerary is available here. Media opportunity for you will be at the Green Development Company in Mostar Southeast municipality. For those who do not know where is this location it is by the entrance to Blagaj and that is where he is going to address journalists. After the visit to Mostar Southeast municipality, which is the only location that he will visit in Mostar, he will pay a visit to Ljubuski Municipal Court. Should you have any more questions regarding this visit do not hesitate to contact me.

Henning Phillip:

Good morning everybody.

This is the final press conference before the elections. OSCE RC Mostar would like to take this opportunity to remind all citizens of their democratic right and obligation to vote. Voting is the essence of democracy and is the main instrument of the people to influence politics in their country. The upcoming elections are of a decisive nature. Bosnia and Herzegovina has made first significant steps to join the family of European nations. Rule of Law and economic reform need to take roots if the country would like to finally reach the standard of developed European countries. This can be achieved in a not so far away future. However, the condition is that those forces, which stand for reform, are voted into power. This is the responsibility of all citizens of BiH. No progress can be achieved by looking backwards and by cementing ethnic division. The future of BiH lies in overcoming those divisions and to ensure equal rights and equal chances for all its citizens. Recent public tribunals on various issues held in Mostar and around proved that the democratic tradition of holding politicians accountable has beginning to take roots in our region. This encouraging development should now be complemented by voters' turnout, which shows that BiH is really on the way to stable democracy.

On another note. As a result of a joint effort of OSCE Regional Center Mostar and Political Resource Centers in Sarajevo, Trebinje and Ljubuski, young politicians from different regions of BiH and from a wide span of political parties gathered in Ljubuski on the weekend 27/28 September. The purpose of the meeting was to exchange ideas on Youth issues, including higher education reform. Participants also took the opportunity to exchange promotion materials from their respective political parties and contact details with a view to further cooperation. Participants in OSCE's Successor Generation Initiative (SGI) used the opportunity to share their experiences with their peers, and much interest was shown by the audience to join the program. Emphasis was put on the usefulness of such meetings and the International Community's support for activities that bring together people of different political, religious and linguistic orientation. A follow up meeting was agreed on to take place on 12/13 October. OSCE sees the meeting in Ljubuski as another encouraging sign of young people taking initiative and of strengthening their participation in political life.