

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR	Avis Benes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reminder to municipal authorities of the issue of land allocation• Mostar Fair Play 2002 Football Tournament
OSCE	Philipp Henning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ambassador Beecroft's visit to Mostar• Public Tribune on Economy• Public Tribune on Demobilisation
SFOR	Maj. De Lambert	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No statement

Avis Benes - OHR

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to yet another press conference of International Organisations seated in Mostar. I am happy to see you in such a big number today. On behalf of the OHR, today we have two brief points for you the first one of which be available to you in writing after the press conference. That point is actually a reminder to the municipal authorities regarding the allocation of socially-owned land.

OHR-South would like to remind municipal authorities in the region of the necessity to comply with the provisions of the High Representative's decision on the allocation of socially owned land, originally passed in April 2000. This decision stipulates that "municipal authorities that wish to re-allocate state-owned real property, including former socially-owned property, must submit a written request to the OHR", i.e. apply for a land waiver. OHR South notes its concern that many municipalities in our area of responsibility have totally failed to comply with the decision, leaving many land allocations in a precarious legal position.

The HR decision on the allocation of socially owned land was established in the public interest, to ensure transparency and non-discrimination in the allocation of construction land plots to the beneficiaries. The failure of some authorities to comply with the decision would seem to indicate a lack of concern for the public interest and the rule of law. We call on all authorities in the region who have thus far not initiated the procedures proscribed in the decision to begin doing so immediately.

On a different note, we have been asked by the Turkish Consulate in Mostar to remind you that this year, for the third time in a row, "Mostar Fair Play" football tournament will also be held. The first matches this week, i.e. the forthcoming Thursday, Friday and Saturday, will be held in the North Camp compound. The semi-finals and finals, to be played next Tuesday and Wednesday, will be held at Kantarevac stadium. As many of you already know, the teams of Mostar municipalities, journalists, international organisations, Mostar Veterans Association, the US Office, the Croatian Consulate (for the first time), will take part so I believe it is going to be interesting. As for the precise schedule of the matches, it is available to you in writing. So, the solemn opening of the Tournament takes place tomorrow, September 19 2002, at 19:15 o'clock at the North Camp playground. That is all on behalf of the OHR, now I give the floor to Philipp Henning from the OSCE.

Philipp Henning - OSCE

Good morning, everybody. Ambassador Robert Beecroft, Head of the OSCE Mission to BiH, visited Mostar yesterday evening. In a TV interview, he said that this country needs to rebuild itself into a modern, western state prepared to take its proper place in the councils of mainstream Europe. "BiH has no viable alternative", he said. The Ambassador emphasised that the electorate plays a vital part in this transformation to a democratic state. The voters must exercise their democratic right or, if they choose not to go to the polls on 5 October, they will have to live with the results for the next four years. "This is the nature of democracy", said Beecroft. He urged the citizens of BiH to take the opportunity to influence the future of their country at the ballot box.

On another note, the OSCE is continuing organising its series of public tribunals. The next one will be on economy and will be held today in Prozor. It is aimed to give politicians and citizens the opportunity to exchange views about economic issues and to discuss plans and strategies on economic development. Representatives from six parties will attend the tribunal. It will be held today at 18:00 hours at the Meeting Hall of the Hydroelectric Plant Rama building in Prozor.

Another public tribunal I would like to announce will take place on Monday here in Mostar, also at 18:00 hours at Hrvatski Dom "Herceg Stjepan Kosača" building. This tribunal will deal with the reduction of the armed forces with a special emphasis on the employment opportunities for the demobilised soldiers. At this tribunal, we will have twelve parties' representatives. That is all from the OSCE.

Avis Benes - OHR

SFOR has no particular point today but, as usual, Major De Lambert is open to your questions if any.

Questions:

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): I have a question for the OHR and a question for SFOR respectively. You will be aware of yesterday's press conference of the Union of Independent Trade Unions of BiH. Inter alia, the Union's president also accused the IC for the difficult situation, as well as the local bodies of authority for their inefficiency – he has actually said the IC has the mandate and instruments to remove those who cause obstructions, those who do not form bodies of authority on time and are thus responsible for the situation by not meeting their obligations on time. I would like to hear your reply to this statement.

My question to Major De Lambert refers to last night's media reports on the issue of the Ravna Gora Movement.

A: Major De Lambert: I did not quite understand, I am afraid I am not aware of the issue....

Q: Mirsad Behram: In that case, I give my question up.

A: Avis Benes: I do not think there is a particular need to comment too much on those statements. What the OHR primarily wishes for, before any talk on possible removals, is that the Government and all those responsible for the functioning of the Canton do the job properly and in a more efficient and more rational manner. You are aware of the OHR involvement in the entire process, you know recommendations have been made to the Government as to how to overcome and end the crisis. In any case, we take the situation to be more than serious. That is all I am going to say on the issue.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): My question goes to the OSCE. Mr. Henning, the leaders of the Yugoslav and Serbian authorities more and more frequently and openly bring into question the BiH integrity. This morning's press report that the Serbian PM, Zoran Djindjic, simply mocked the BiH integrity at a gathering abroad. Before that, Kostunica also gave statements that called upon the annexation of the RS to Yugoslavia. One gets an impression that the IC is completely indifferent towards the issue – why is that so?

A: Philipp Henning: Well, the IC took a very clear position to these releases in the media. The Board of Principals has reacted publicly to the statements Mr. Kostunica and his Deputy as to something which was related to elections only. And the OSCE is of the opinion that we should stick to the official statements by the leading politicians in the Balkans, including Mr. Kostunica, Djindjic and all the others. All of them have stated that there is no room for any change of the borders in the Balkans and we take that as their official positions.

A: Avis Benes: Let me add on behalf of the OHR – the territorial integrity is in no way in question. Perhaps it is better not to comment on some of individuals' pre-election statements.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): The main topic of yesterday's press conference of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton HDZ Board was the health issue. Cantonal Minister Raguz yesterday blamed Bosniak colleagues for the fact that the Health Insurance Fund has not been integrated yet. He also blamed the IC noting that the 15-day deadline, during which PDHR, Ambassador Hays, was supposed to draw up a proposal for the process, has expired. He stated that they have not received any reply or feedback on the issue yet.

A: Avis Benes: True, the deadline has expired. According to the information I have, the entire project has been finalised and not it is a matter of time when it will be presented. It is expected that it will be presented in the shortest period possible.

Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X): I have a question for the OHR since I know you do not deal with the election issue but you do deal with the education issue.

A: Avis Benes: I have to correct you – when it comes to the issue of education, I believe you know that it is the OSCE which has primarily taken over the mandate for this field.

Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X): All right, then. My question is addressed to the OHR but the OSCE representative can also respond to it if he likes. A local TV last night reported on the meeting between the Rector of Mostar Sveuciliste (Croat University) with Mr. Covic, the HDZ BiH candidate for the Croat member of the BiH Presidency. During the meeting, Mr. Ljubic, the Rector, openly and publicly supported Mr. Covic saying he would be the most favourable choice for Sveuciliste. To what extent is this in contravention with the independence of Sveuciliste and could the Rector get sanctioned over this? Let me remind that for the last elections, the Rector of Mostar “Dzemal Bijedic” University (Bosniak) was on the SDA candidates’ list. When will such a practice change or end?

A: Avis Benes: As far as the OHR is concerned, I do not think the issue deserves any other comment except for the fact that, in any normal country, a University’s independence and high education is a prerequisite for modern educational system and European way of thinking. Any further questions? No? Thank you and see you next week.