

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR	Avis Benes	O OHR(S) stance on issue of adoption of HNC budget
SFOR	Maj. De Lambert	O Harvest campaign

Avis Benes - OHR

On behalf of the OHR I have only one item for you today. It regards the OHR stance on issue of adoption of the cantonal budget in Herzegovina Neretva Canton. There will be no need for translation.

As it is already known, the Cantonal Government has adopted a new proposal of the cantonal budget for 2002 on Monday, 29 July 2002. OHR welcomes prompt reaction of the Cantonal Government and expects that the Cantonal Assembly, which should be held as soon as possible, will show similar level of constructiveness. OHR is aware that the proposed version of the budget is not perfect, however an important progress in comparison to previous years has been achieved. As we have been informed, according to this budget proposal, the budget beneficiaries would be all paid at the same time and salaries would not be deferred according to the ethnic principle. OHR does not intend to interfere into procedures that are to follow in relation to further discussions and final adoption of the budget; however, OHR is seriously concerned with this situation as we have emphasised on a number of occasions so far. We consider that in this moment the well-being of citizens should be the first priority, much more important than various political calculations. Those in Cantonal Assembly, who want to use voting on the budget as a political tool and pre-election campaigning, should seriously reconsider their position. Once again, it should be very clear that non-adoption of budget causes further delay in the payment of salaries, which have been put on hold for months already and it is absolutely impermissible. OHR considers that those who intend to prolong the obstruction of the budget adoption have to take full responsibility for their actions. They should be assured that the OHR will not remain passive in this matter. We do expect the Cantonal Assembly session to be held as soon as possible. As far as we know, materials have already been distributed to the members of the Assembly. The only thing left to be done is to analyse the materials and convene a session.

Also, I have a few short reminders for you. In the materials that are made available to you there is a copy of the speech of the High Representative delivered at the Federation Parliament. I believe you all received it yesterday.

Furthermore, there is a copy of the press release, which was distributed around 21.00 last night and has not reached all the newspapers yet, on the meeting between the Peace Implementation Council and BiH authorities who are jointly working on the economic reform. This meeting started yesterday at 17.30 hrs. Also, let me remind you that the High Representative will hold a press conference after the meeting with Political Directors of the Peace Implementation Council, today at 14.15 hrs. You can attend this press conference if anybody of you intends to go to Sarajevo today.

Maj. De Lambert - MND SE

Dobar dan ladies and gentlemen. Just one item concerning our Harvest campaign and practical information.

Harvest Campaign led by SFOR is about to resume close to our homes. The main goal of this campaign, as you know, remains to be collection of illegally held weapons and/or ammunition, in order to maintain peace and safe environment. This time SFOR will use a different approach. Weapon and ammunition will be collected the same way it is done with the garbage collection. SFOR soldiers will come, knock at the people's house doors and ask if anybody has any weapon and/or ammunition to hand over. SFOR will not enter anybody's home, but only knock at the door and ask this question. As usual, illegally held weapon and/or ammunition has to be handed over to SFOR soldiers, and identity will stay anonymous and no charges will be pressed against those who surrender their weapon or ammunition. So this collection campaign will take place in South East Municipality of Mostar, in a time

period between the 05th and 15th of August. First week of campaign will be dedicated to the advertisement, where in the second week, SFOR will start with the collection of weapon and ammunition. So concerning the agenda – please excuse me for a very bad accent – Monday the 12th August in Podvezlje, Tuesday the 13th August in Blagaj, Wednesday the 14th August in Gornje Gnojnice and Thursday the 15th August in Vranjevici Donji.

Questions

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): I have a question concerning the OHR stance on adoption of the cantonal budget. I have the impression that the OHR practically demands from the Cantonal Assembly to adopt budget proposal that was prepared at the last session of the Cantonal Government. This morning, we have received a letter from the Trade Union of Herzegovina Neretva Canton with Bosniac majority, which inter alia expresses that they are strongly against the provision on 5% contribution for the salaries of the education employees. I believe this remark will probably be taken into consideration at the next session of the Cantonal Assembly. Concretely, I would like to know what does it mean that the OHR will not remain passive in this matter, i.e. if this version of the budget is not adopted.

A: Avis Benes: It actually means continuation of further activities, i.e. continuity of the OHR attitude on the adoption of the cantonal budget which was active all along. When we say demand – we demand responsibility. You are all aware of how did the last Cantonal Assembly session go, when certain issues were not passed without any additional explanation. In any case, I think that this whole situation should be very, very clear to the public in general. On one hand, there is this budget which is neither ideal nor perfect and which, of course, allows a lot of room for improvements. On the other hand, there are budget beneficiaries who either do not receive their salaries or who receive salaries on the basis of the last year's budget, for which all agree it is worse than this one, and the situation with certain political calculations aimed at gaining political points on the issue of adoption of the budget instead of considering the well-being of citizens as top priority. I will leave this last part up to you to explore it further.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): Question for Mr. De Lambert. Two days ago, Federation Parliament Commission that is investigating case of the Mostar ammunition caches stated that the state institutions will reinforce this investigation. This sounds very promising but given that these institutions were not able to resolve smaller problems it is difficult to expect that they will succeed this time. Could we expect a more ambitious involvement of SFOR in this investigation?

A: Maj. De Lambert: As far as I know, SFOR is no longer involved in this investigation. The BIH Ministry is in charge of this so I have no further information.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): Two questions for SFOR. Last May, General Amarger stated that there are 4,000 more mortar shells hidden somewhere in the region of Mostar. Could you tell us if there are any results, have these mortar shells been discovered, have you concluded this investigation? Second question – are there any results regarding the SFOR raid into the 88th Battalion?

A: Maj. De Lambert: As far as I know, the 88th Battalion in Rodoc investigation gave nothing. No information raised as far as I know. I think computers were given back to the unit.

Concerning the famous mortar shell caches, 4000 mortar shells – I have no information for the time being. Everybody is working on this issue – SFOR, IPTF, local police and the Ministry of Defense but nothing raised for the time being.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): Question for OHR – Have you received any official appeal or complaint regarding the political party's reaction to the alleged construction of the sport hall in Trebinje on the site of the pre-war museum of Begova house? Did you get anything official on this? Since one of the political parties, it does not matter which one, claims it is an attempt of destruction of a culture and identity of one nation in that region would it be in the line with the OHR's mandate to do something on this matter?

A: Avis Benes: To the extent that I am familiar with the correspondence that we receive I can tell you that at this very moment OHR has not received anything on that matter. True, Trebinje is part of our area of responsibility where we currently have a Special Envoy Ambassador Istvan Ozzi. In any case, I shall check this with our Office in Trebinje.

Q: Ivan Bakovic (HTV Mostar): Ms. Benes, regarding the appointment or non-appointment of Franjo Franjic as Federation Minister of Finance I would like to know if Mr. High Representative would make the appointment in the line with his competencies or let the Alliance project fall apart?

A: Avis Benes: What I can tell you on this matter is that the High Representative Paddy Ashdown is meeting with the NHI today. However, he believes this question is primarily a question of responsibility of the FBIf authorities, even though the manner in which they presently behave on this matter undermines their credibility. Let me remind you that while addressing the Federation Parliament yesterday the High Representative tackled this issue. He urged the MPs to put the interests of good governance before party politics and ensure that both positions, Ministers of Finance and Refugees/Social Welfare, are filled without delay.