

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR	Avis Benes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HoOHR(S) with C7 representatives on budget issue• HoOHR(S) with representatives of Jewish Community Mostar• Illegal fees charged by Soko and Dom companies for purchase of apartments
OSCE	Richard Medic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentations of Guide for de-mobilised soldiers
SFOR	Maj. De Lambert	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Harvest campaign

Avis Benes - OHR

On behalf of the OHR I have three issues with regard to some of our last week's activities. The first one refers to the meetings that the Deputy High Representative and Head of the OHR South Mr. Jean-Pierre Bercot had with the cantonal officials on the budget issue, the issue of concern for the entire Canton which is non-adoption of the cantonal budget.

Firstly, on Friday 19 July, he met with representatives of the Cantonal Assembly, i.e. representatives of the Bosniak and Croat caucuses and representatives of all political parties represented at the Assembly. He conveyed them his and OHR concerns about, among others, lack of responsibility of those who did not propose any amendments at the last session of the Cantonal Assembly, while at the same time advocating non-adoption of the budget. Moreover, he urged them for better coordination of positions of political parties represented in the Government and the Assembly.

Two days ago, as you probably know, Ambassador Bercot met HNC Prime Minister Macic and his Deputy Coric as well as with Minister of Finance Tipura and Deputy Minister of Finance Mr. Butigan. DHR Bercot expressed the OHR view on unpermissible delay in the adoption of the cantonal budget and urgency of further action. Assurances were given that the Government already started working on a revised budget proposal that will be discussed at the next HNC Government session. In both of these meetings, most of the Cantonal officials expressed their faith in possibility that revised budget could be adopted by the end of July. OHR will continue to monitor the situation and expects that all Cantonal officials will perform their duties in a fully responsible manner having in mind the seriousness of the whole situation.

Second issue refers to another meeting that the Head of our Office held - the meeting with representatives of the Jewish Community/municipality in Mostar. Namely, on Monday, 22 July, he met with representatives of the Jewish Community in Mostar and its president, Ms. Erna Danon-Cipra. Deputy High Representative Bercot congratulated on her recent appointment and expressed OHR's continued support for the work of the Jewish Community in Mostar. Deputy High Representative Bercot would also like to thank former president of the Jewish Community in Mostar, Mr. Zoran Mandelbaum for his previous prominent and active work in that capacity.

Third issue that the OHR takes very seriously refers to the charging illegal fees in the process of purchase of apartments. Namely, in March 2002 OHR South received several complaints from citizens attempting to privatize their apartments that certain companies were charging fees for the privatization process, in particular companies "Dom" and "Soko". Deputy High Representative Mr. Bercot informed both companies of the illegality of their actions and recommended reimbursement of the fees to those who had previously paid, which of course they should not have paid. For your information, I think that Soko charged 250 KM per case, and DOM 150 KM. As there were no additional complaints, the matter was believed to be resolved. However, recently in July 2002, new complaints against the mentioned companies were received. OHR strongly urges these companies to stop with the illegal practice of charging fees in the process of purchase of apartments, since it is not the purchaser but the seller who is responsible for covering certain costs, which are specified in the law. This is a simple question of the rule of law and in principle all it is needed is respect of the letter of law. The legal interpretation has been forwarded to these companies. If these companies continue with such actions, they clearly defiantly violate the legal regulations and appropriate measures will need to be taken.

Richard Medic - OSCE

A short point from OSCE concerning the information on Guide for de-mobilized soldiers and other citizens. With the help of OSCE and other international organisations, the Federation Government recently released a book containing information on training, employment, housing and credit programs; as well as laws and regulations, such as those related to establishing small businesses. Tomorrow there will be two presentations of the Guide hosted by the Federation Army. The first will be hosted by the First Corps of the Federation Army (Croat component) and will take place at the cinema hall, within the army barracks Stanislav Baja Kraljevic on Thursday, 25 July from 10am. The second presentation will be hosted by the First Corps of the Army of FBiH, and will take place at the cinema hall of Midhat Hujdur-Hujka centre on Thursday, 25 July from 11am. All media are cordially invited to attend.

Avis Benes - OHR

Before I give the floor to SFOR I would like to inform you that you will be able to get the OHR statement after this press conference.

Maj. De Lambert - MND SE

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Just one statement from me.

Following on the project Harvest results announced by SFOR last month I am pleased to say that generally for January – June period the figures have improved substantially. Harvest summer campaign will start in a few days. First week of August will be dedicated to advertise this campaign through all media. Second phase of the project will have a stress on the practical part of the campaign – collection phase – which we will start in middle of August and end by middle of September. I would like to remind you again that the project Harvest is a co-operative initiative conducted by both BIH Armed Forces, local authorities and police as well as IPTF and SFOR who are tasked to remove all illegally held weapon, ammunition and war-like material from circulation. Overall the main goal is to improve general safety within BIH. local armed forces units will remain to stay in charge and destruction of the collected ammunition and weaponry. However if requested multi-national division battle groups will provide them with support.

This concludes my statement.

Questions

Q: Ivan Bakovic (HTV Mostar): Question for Ms. Benes – Will the OHR request SFOR to forcibly confiscate documentation from the Federation Ministry of Defence and Federation Ministry of Interior if they continue failing to deliver documentation on the case of ammunition caches in Mostar, as C7 Interior Minister said?

A: Avis Benes: Thank you for your question. However I would not say that this issue has a lot in common with the competencies of the OHR in a sense that we have already expressed our position on the investigation into the ammunition caches in Mostar – we expect a really quick investigation and of course we expect full co-operation of all bodies concerned. The UN Mission might give you more details on this. I think that at this point of time such speculations are not close to any possible actions of the OHR.

Q: Ivan Bakovic (HTV Mostar): Additional question – you said that you expect a quick investigation. It does not seem to be the case, and that is why I asked such a question.

A: Avis Benes: In any case, the OHR can continue urging bodies that are dealing with this issue to be as efficient as possible. We are not fully i.e. we are not involved at all in all details of the investigation and it is not up to the OHR to comment on that.

Q: Ivan Bakovic (HTV Mostar): Why did SFOR conducted the inspection in the 88th Battalion in Mostar last week? What was discovered?

A: Maj. De Lambert: On July 17, SFOR decided to conduct an inspection on Rodoc site where the 88th battalion HQ is located. The goal of this operation was to confirm if illegal activities could have been conducted in

contravention of GFPA. As you know, SFOR should have the impeded right to observe, monitor and inspect any forces or facility in BIH that SFOR believes may have military capability. Computers and other items were seized. These assets have been sent to Sarajevo to be checked. It will probably take several more days to get some conclusions. The authorities should have a very good relationship and collaboration with inspectors, they attended all requests made by the searching team providing all information and support required. For the time being we are still waiting for results.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): What has forced SFOR to conduct this inspection?

A: Maj. De Lambert: SFOR suspected illegal activities conducted by this 88th battalion.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): I have a question pertaining to the Health care insurance institute. At the press conference held on the 26th of June you said that the OHR was going to undertake certain measures in two weeks time. It happened after the visit of Mr. Hays and his talks with the cantonal officials on the unification of this institute. What is happening with this?

A: Avis Benes: I think it is still in the process and to be honest I will have to check with the Office of Mr. Hays and get back to you.