

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

Avis Benes, OHR Spokesperson: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to Press Conference of International Organisations seated in Mostar.

Today on behalf of the OHR we have two things. The first one concerns the merging of this Canton's ministries. As you are aware we have been dealing with this intensely and have this year paid a lot of attention to.

Prime Minister Macic and Deputy Prime Minister Coric invited the Deputy High Representative, Jean Pierre Berçot, to visit the merged premises of Canton 7 ministries on Friday, 24 May. This visit came as a conclusion to almost three months of negotiations on the subject, and after OHR South increased pressure on those cantonal officials who co-signed the 28 February action plan on merging. Just as the Deputy High Representative Berçot informed the citizens of this Canton of OHR South's discontentment over their official representatives' lack of commitment, the Deputy High Representative Berçot is now pleased to inform the public that his visit to the merged premises on Friday concluded very positively. Which means that Mr. Berçot saw for himself that majority of the ministries had merged in the common locations. It is unfortunate, however, that this long awaited merging was completed almost only due to the International Community's pressure and not for the primary interest of the citizens of this Canton. Still, the Deputy High Representative Berçot hopes that this physical merging of cantonal ministries will mark a new beginning in the work of the Cantonal Government, since this Government has no other option than to change its hitherto behaviour. Also, Deputy High Representative Berçot would like to thank all those who finally made this merging possible and who made the commitment to advance this irreversible process.

So, that is all on the ministries merging issue. It is only the Ministry of Justice which has yet to merge at one location, the delay has been partly caused by the removal of Mr. Silic but we expected that it will be done and finalised in the shortest period possible.

The next thing that I would like to mention is something that you are already aware of, but in principal I can today give you answers in case you have some additional questions regarding the on-going "Ima smisla" campaign run by the OHR. You will have realised that the message of this campaign is that economic prosperity and European integration require reform, co-operation and functioning institutions at the State level. So, it makes sense, ima smisla, to have a single economic space – the BiH market is small anyway, and if it is fragmented, it is not worth while doing business and investing here. If there is no economic activity, there will never be new jobs and economic recovery. It makes sense for the Entities to co-operate and pass laws that will attract investment. You all know that there is a huge amount of obstacles between the 2 entities – if a company want to make business in the other entity, there is a series of administrative obstacles. We should all work on removing those obstacles. Some things in this direction have already been achieved. It makes sense to strive for European integration by adjusting BiH laws and standards to European legislation and norms. The first challenge for BiH is to meet the 18 requirements of the "EU Road Map", after which the EU will conduct a feasibility study assessing whether BiH is ready for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU.

The elements of this campaign are three different TV spots, two radio spots, billboards and newspaper ads. The campaign has run since early May and will continue until mid-June. That is all for now on behalf of the OHR. Now I give the floor to Richard of the OSCE.

Richard Medic, OSCE Spokesperson: Good morning. I have only one point for you today and it relates to the Round Table that I due next Tuesday. Earlier this year, the Council of Europe office in Sarajevo in co-operation with OSCE launched the BiH edition of the

"European Charter on the Participation of Young People In Municipal and Regional Life".

The Charter outlines the ways in which young people can participate in public life, and urges the authorities to provide the necessary conditions for integrating youth into the democratic processes shaping the future of BiH.

Next week, the OSCE Mostar, Mostar Mayor and Deputy Mayor, as well as the six Heads of the municipalities are hosting the roundtable discussion to introduce the Charter to local youth and their organisations. The discussion will seek to elicit concrete proposals for implementing mechanisms for greater youth participation in municipal and regional life.

It is hoped the roundtable will be the first step in a consultative process between young people and government representatives.

OSCE would therefore like to invite media to this important event, which will take place on Tuesday, 4 June 2002, starting at 14h:00. The venue will be in Mostar City Administration Building, Adema Buca Street.

During this event, the OSCE will also present its "We can do it" art book to roundtable participants and the local public. The book features 200 artworks submitted by young people.

Again, I encourage media to attend the Round Table and to offer their support to what we hope will be the beginning of a long-term collaborative effort between local youth, government and YOURSELVES. That is all from me today. Thank you.

Avis Benes: Thank you, Richard. And now we go to Kirsten and the UNMiBH.

Kirsten Haupt, UNMiBH Spokesperson: Thank you. Good morning. First I want to give you a short update on the investigation of the ammunition caches.

The investigation into the recent ammunition caches in Mostar is continuing and appears to make progress. A fifth suspect was arrested on 27 May in Sarajevo and handed over to Canton 7 Ministry of Interior on 28 May. Currently, five individuals are under investigation, two of whom are in pre-trial detention. So far, statements have been taken from four of the accused, the fifth, who only arrived in Mostar this week, has not given his statement yet. To date, the police performance in this investigation has been satisfactory. As the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton Ministry of Interior announced in a press release yesterday, the investigation has now been extended to include other individuals who had commanding positions in the respective companies at the time.

Coming to another issue, UNMiBH is very concerned over the recent intimidation of the Imam Husein Hodzic in Trebinje. Last Friday, on 24 May, the Imam was harassed by a group of young men. One of them yelled at him that a hand grenade should be thrown at him. Upon reporting this incident to the local police, the perpetrator was identified on Monday 27 May and a search of his house was ordered by the Court. Nothing was found and the investigation is continuing. UNMiBH calls on the PSC Trebinje to thoroughly investigate this incident. There have been repeated incidents targeting Bosniak representatives and returnees in Trebinje in the past. The police should adopt an attitude of zero-tolerance regarding ethnic-related incidents and conduct a professional and robust police investigation into this particular recent incident. This would be the best way to send a strong signal to those who continue to create incidents with the aim to hamper the return process. Considering the repeated involvement of juveniles in ethnically related incidents, UNMiBH expects the police to press charges against parents whose children have committed criminal acts, and also to identify and investigate those who instigate juveniles to commit such criminal act.

In connection with this involvement of juveniles in criminal activities, UNMiBH initiated a meeting that takes place today in Trebinje between school representatives and the PSC Trebinje to address the very problem of juvenile crime. Teachers are also accountable and should play a more pro-active role in preventing children and juveniles to commit criminal acts. The Imam and a representative of the Orthodox Church are to attend this meeting which is aimed at promoting tolerance and reconciliation and preventing young people to get involved in return related incidents, disturbances of public peace and order and drug-related crime. Thank you.

Avis Benes: Thank you, Kirsten. And now, let's go to SFOR and Ltc. Rambaud.

Ltc. Nicolas Rambaud, SFOR MNDSE Spokesperson: Thanks, Avis. I have a short statement for today about "Red Wing" exercise at Sarajevo International Airport.

On Monday 27th of May 2002, MND-SE organised a training exercise at the Sarajevo International Airport. The goal of this exercise was to check the response ability performed by Sarajevo Air Detachment and local fire-fighters, ambulance crews and emergency medical teams after a simulated air disaster.

MND-SE is very satisfied with the performance demonstrated by local services and will support the shifting of security duties from SFOR to local security services, firemen and medics which should have to be confirmed by the end of June. Then, these services will fully take over this responsibility.

Questions:

Zvonimir Jukic, ONASA: I have one question for SFOR and another one for OHR.

I would like to know whether SFOR forces are coming closer to finding some 4000 more grenades which are hidden somewhere in Mostar?

As for the question to the OHR, I would like to hear a comment on the letter of Stolac Municipality Council – Bosniak councillors, who are dissatisfied with the latest decision made by the High Representative and claim that his latest decision puts them in an unequal position of minority.

Ltc. Rambaud: For the first question about these 4000 grenades, I have to tell you that SFOR is continuing to search. And we will end when we find them. For the moment we have no substantial results. But the first thing is that we would like to thank to all civilians and persons who phoned us and gave us some pieces of information, and we encourage them to continue in this way.

Avis Benes: I am glad you have asked this question about Stolac because I think it is necessary clarify some things regarding this decision, the things which are not fully clear to the public and which have been misinterpreted in the letter of Bosniak councillors from Stolac. In any case, this provision of the Stolac Statute exists since 18 March 1998. You all remember the year of 1998 and numerous incidents, especially the returns-related ones, that were occurring at that time in Stolac.

At that time, the Arbitration decision on the implementation of the results of municipal elections in Stolac was co-signed by OHR and OSCE and it confirmed the establishment of the two-third quorum of all elected councillors for convoking the Municipal Council session. I just want to point that this order was a unique provision on the Federation level, which means that none of the municipalities in the Federation had this provision, which clearly singled Stolac out from other municipalities. From 1998 to 2000, Stolac Municipal Council – as far as I remember – met only twice. Those journalists who were here last year do remember that the OHR warned that this provision was often used by Bosniak councillors to block the work of the Municipal Council. Nevertheless, since the last elections, the work of Municipality Council made certain improvement and, generally speaking, the situation in Stolac has a tendency towards a certain improvement although it is far from satisfactory and this has to be clear. However, the OHR considers that it is no longer necessary to single-out Stolac from the principles that are there for other municipalities in the Federation. So, on 23 May 2002, last week, the decision was made on the Amendments to Article 23 of the Statute of the Municipality of Stolac in accordance with which there is no more the need for the two-thirds quorum for efficient functioning of the Municipal Council of Stolac. As I have already said, the singling out did not really contribute to the constructive work, and every time Bosniak officials would disagree with some point of the Agenda, they would walk out of the session, the session would be over and no other points would be discussed. So, this is just about harmonising with other municipalities. With this provision and with regards to this specific issue, Bosniaks in Stolac are brought into the same position as Bosniacs in Prozor and Rama or Croats in Vares or Bugojno. In any case, it cannot be said that the two-third quorum is the only mechanism for the protection of rights of the Bosniak people, these rights are guaranteed by the Dayton Peace Accord, by some other provisions and especially with the constitutional changes. It is necessary to emphasise that, according to the Municipal Statute, the two-third majority is still necessary – so in this constellation it is impossible to make any important decision without Bosniaks. The two-third majority is needed for a series of other decisions such as changing of the Statute, appointment of the Mayor and some other appointments, adoption of the budget etc. Regarding the announced boycott of the Bosniak councillors in the Municipal Council of Stolac, I think that each of you knows the OHR attitude about the boycott of the work on any authority/political level no matter which side it comes from, boycott is definitely not a constructive measure and it usually harms the ones who chose a boycott allegedly on behalf of those who they are supposed to represent. Basically, the way to go in BiH is not emphasising exceptions but normalisation. In the future, we expect more improvements in the Stolac Municipality in general which, as I have said, is far from satisfactory. The international community will continue to monitor the whole situation in Stolac and we are very interested in the entire process. This was somewhat longer explanation but I hope that it was helpful to clarify certain things on the issue.

Mirsad Behram, RTV MO: I also have a question for the OHR. It was announced yesterday that the HNC unified budget was finally adopted by the Cantonal Government. Bearing in mind that this was not the first time the Government has announced the unified budget, could you tell us whether you consider that the budget is truly unified or this is just another deception of the public?

Avis Benes: What is positive is that they finally and jointly agreed on this draft budget. OHR at this moment would not like to go into details about the budget itself. We expect that this will be discussed as soon as possible at the next Cantonal Assembly. Of course, if there are some objections, then they should be clearly and transparently brought up and discussed in a most serious manner.

Ivan Bakovic, HRTV MO: I have a question for Mr. Medic from OSCE and another one for LtC. Rambaud, i.e. SFOR.

Yesterday and today, some media have published a list of allegedly suspended persons who will not be able to run on the next election, which was allegedly published by the Election Commission. The list also contains a certain group of some HVO officers. They have been allegedly suspended to run in the elections over the alleged suspension by the SFOR Commander. The question for Mr. Medic is whether it is true that this decision really exists. LtC. Rambaud, has the SFOR commander suspended, for instance, general OBRADOVIC who personally registered himself for the election but who claims that he has never heard of or has received such a decision?

Richard Medic: You have to excuse me for I'll answer in English. As far as the Election Commission, I am aware that they met yesterday. As far as the media speculations about HVO officers being suspended, I am not aware of the Election Commission talking about that. If you would like me to find that out, I can get back to you after the conference.

LtC. Rambaud: I can only say that I also as you read what is written in the newspapers and it is true that one general was proposed to be removed by the COMSFOR. The only case I know is one general who was responsible for espionage of our radio assets.

Ivan Bakovic, HRTV MO: If there has been a suspension in the case of general Obradovic, it is about a suspension that dates back a year ago. General Obradovic has not been an active military official for a year now.

LtC. Rambaud: I do not know about this. I can check.

Tina Jelin, Studio 88: A question for UNMBIH. Can you confirm that Mehmed Bajgoric has been this morning transferred to psychiatric ward of Sarajevo Hospital, since there have been reports that his health condition was seriously jeopardised and deteriorated. In the last ten days he has not received any of the visits following his detention in Mostar prison, he was literally thrown into the prison. Unfortunately, there are some rumours and information that such treatment has been ordered by someone. Can you also confirm the information from yesterday's release by the HNC Cantonal Ministry of the Interior, in which they informed the public that they are dissatisfied with the co-operation of the Federation Ministry of Defence. As much as I understood, the reason of this dissatisfaction relates to exchange of documentation.

Kirsten Haupt: First part of the question: as far as I know there has been already an initial or first examination of Mr Bajgoric, a psychological examination here in Mostar and the Court and the Prosecutor has now requested to have a second opinion. And for that reason it has been initiated that he would be examined again in Sarajevo. Whether he has left already today for Sarajevo I can not confirm that, I do not know that. But the request to have a defendant psychologically examined, it can be a usual procedure in the Court if defendant lawyer comes forward with that request. And I guess that the request of the Prosecutor to get a second opinion would also be a part of the very normal procedure. On the second part of the question, I have seen the press release of the Ministry of Interior. I am not in a position to give my comment on their complaints vis-a-vis the FBiH Ministry of Defence, the MoI is conducting the investigation in this incident, so it is, whatever they say they say on their own behalf and I do not want to comment on it. Thank you.

Denis Vila, RTV MO: I would also like to address the situation concerning the letter of Bosniak councillors in Stolac. I just need an illustration of what you already have said. You have compared the life of Bosniaks in Stolac, with the life of Croats in Vares ...

Avis Benes: No, I did not compare the life, just to correct you. What I did say about this provision on the two-third

quorum regarding the convoking of session and agreeing upon the Agenda, the position of the Bosniaks in Stolac is equalised with the position of Croats in Vares and Bugojno or Bosniaks in Rama/Prozor or in any other municipality in the Federation.

Interruption - Denis Vila, RTVMO: Can you explain what their situation is?

Avis Benes: I was talking about the two-third quorum provision and about nothing else. I was not getting into comparing the situation...

Interruption - Mirsad Behram, RTVMO: - (not audible).. that the situation of Croats in Vares is bad. If so, it is not good of course One can interpret your statement that way.

Avis Benes: No, in principle, I was to say that in the municipalities where a certain people is a minority, in the whole Federation the very same provision exists unlike in Stolac where there was a different provision. With this provision all this had been harmonised, so that all over the Federation there is the same provision now. That is the essence what I wanted to say. This was just an illustration to make it more clear to you....

Interruption - Denis Vila, RTVMO: Are Bosniaks a minority in Stolac?

Avis Benes: I think they are when it comes to numbers, it is written....Take a look at the letter written by Bosniak councillors in which they speak of the figures and claim to be a minority, that is a data presented by them.

Faruk Kajtaz, Youth Radio X: Can I ask one more question about the situation in Stolac. You have yourself stated that the decision was based on the grounds of numerous problems in the municipality Stolac. In another words, there were good reasons to make such a decision. Does the OHR with this decision confirm that these problems are not as serious as they used to be or was it simply concluded, is it that the OHR simply believes that this is not a good thing technically- wise?

Avis Benes: As you yourself said, there have been some improvements in Stolac. But this decision was also very often used to obstruct the work of Stolac Municipal Council. I can quote the decision here: "Since the Municipal election held in April 2000, the functioning of Municipal Council has made improvements in their efficiency. Encouraged by the progress in the work of the Municipal Administration as well by the reconciliation process in the Municipality, today I make the decision on the amendments....etc. " signed by Wolfgang Petrisch. I repeat, this by no means mean that the IC is of the view that the current situation in Stolac is satisfactory and that there is not so much to be done to make it satisfactory. Do not take it wrong.....

Interruption - Denis Vila, RTVMO: There is some confusion here...

Avis Benes: No, there is no confusion, there is absolutely no confusion. Are you implying there are problems only in Stolac and no problems in any other Municipality in the Federation?

Faruk Kajtaz, Youth Radio X: There is an OHR decision passed on grounds of an assessment. What I asked is whether the reasons for which it has been passed ceased to exist. If they have ceased to exist, then say so loud and clear.

Avis Benes: I think that I have been loud and clear and have given you the quote clearly – it cannot be any clearer than this.

Faruk Kajtaz, Youth Radio X: I do think that these reasons have ceased to exist.

Avis Benes: Well, you are not the High Representative.

Ivan Bakovic, HTV MO: I have two more questions – one for Miss. Avis Benes and one for Miss. Kirsten Haupt. What is your comment on yesterday's Cantonal Government Session at which, at the request of the removed Deputy Minister of Justice Mr. Silic to discuss the issue, the Government passed the conclusion that he actually was not obstructing the unification of the Ministry of the Justice as it has been stated in the justification of his removal. What is your comment? It means that to a certain extent the Government refuted the justification of his removal. The question for Miss. Haupt refers to yesterday's alleged suspension of the two assistants in the MoI, Mr. Lukac and Mrs. Zutic. Media last night reported that the IPTF Commissioner denies this decision, while the FTV prime time news report said Minister Maslesa, due to Party for BiH pressures over the investigation into the ammunition

cachets found in Mostar, deliberately keeps on postponing and suspending the decision. What measures will be taken by IPTF?

Avis Benes:

I will be short. We are all aware of the extent of the work of the Cantonal Government regarding the merging of the Ministries, and, probably from their point of view, Mr. Silic was not a problem. He may have not be the one to be singled out when it comes to the obstructions. But, since the entire HNC Government until recently hardly did anything, their reaction should perhaps be viewed in that context. Generally speaking, this was not the only reason for the removal of Mr. Silic, there were numerous other reasons for that, but I believe that you have already received the PR on that.

Kirsten Haupt: I can not say much on this, I do not know about this suspension. If there is any, then I need to check that and this information altogether.

Avis Benes: If there are no more questions, thanks for your attention. See you net week.