Mostar Press Release

The Office of the High Representative is appalled at reports of an attack on two Croatian journalists which took place yesterday, 7 May 1999 in west Mostar.

Two journalists from the Rijeka daily Novi list say they were taken away from the Hotel Ero in town centre, brutally beaten and then ordered to leave the country under threat of death. The assailants showed the victims documents which identified them as ethnic Croats. There are strong indicators that this assault may have been politically motivated. During the hour long beating, the armed attackers inflicted cigarette burns and broke one of the reporters' hands, telling him this was meant to prevent him from writing again. We understand that he was a veteran of the Croatian army.

Croatian newspapers have rightly expressed outrage over the incident.

Any attack on journalists poses a serious threat to the freedom of the press and the rule of law. We are shocked that citizens of Croatia may be under physical threat in west Mostar because of their perceived political loyalties.

We are appalled that some hard-line political elements may be prepared to resort to violence and torture to stifle freedom of speech and freedom of the press. These cowardly elements are apparently frightened by journalistic inquiry and dissent.

The international community demands the authorities launch a thorough investigation and bring those responsible to justice. We are determined to expose those who would attempt to deny basic human rights to the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina and to citizens of neighboring countries.

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