OHR Bulletin 17 – September 3, 1996

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Elections

Campaigns are in top gear for the 14 September elections, with regular debates, meetings and press conferences taking place throughout BH within an improved, albeit still imperfect,

media landscape. An estimated 2.9 million people are eligible to vote, including 641,010 refugees living in 55 countries. Despite existing problems, refugee voting abroad took place between 28 August and 3 September.

The commitment in the international community to holding the national elections on schedule remains firm. Speaking to Radio France, Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, Flavio Cotti said recently, "We have opted to hold the elections above all because they should be viewed as a small, but still the first, step towards the path of reconciliation". Whilst acknowledging the difficulties Cotti underscored that the elections were a step in the right direction. He also pointed out that efforts of the international community in trying to enforce the principles set forth in the Peace Agreement were a more favourable alternative than simply letting things go by inertia.

The High Representative Carl Bildt reiterated his stand that he welcomed proceeding with the high level elections. He said that conditions for these were ripe. The elections were of crucial importance for the formation of joint institutions. With regard to the holding of municipal elections, he said that the decision to postpone them had been taken in view of the *"gross misuse of the registration process noted primarily among refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia"*. He hoped that these elections would be held sooner rather than later, emphasising that if they were to be held under the same circumstances as the 14 September elections there would need to be a substantial security presence.

The Election Appeals Sub-Commission (EASC) decided on 30 August to order the removal of the Deputy President and Secretary of the Gornji Vakuf Local Election Commission and requested the PEC to invalidate more than 900 copies of the P2 forms, after finding that *"serious fraudulent registration incidents"* had occurred in the Croat controlled part of the town (Uskoplje). It was also decided that the Mayor of

Uskoplje should make a public announcement clarifying his commitment to free and fair elections.

Media Development

Following a series of technical and political difficulties, the Open Broadcast Network (OBN), will start broadcasting on 7 September. TV-IN, a joint venture company representing five commercial TV stations and independent journalists in BH including a group from Banja Luka, will be launched with a programme of news, politics and entertainment. The belated but much welcome arrival of this, BH's first independent TV network, will contribute to open access and freedom of expression in the final days of the election campaign and will aim to contribute to a more pluralist media environment in BH in the longer term.

After a formal complaint by the OSCE Media Experts Commission, and following numerous meetings and shuttles to Pale in a joint OSCE/OHR effort, TV Srpska finally apologised on 27 August for an inflammatory statement made by one of their presenters. In its apology, TV Srpska said that, "*The commentary of Ilija Guzina does not reflect an opinion, neither of the SRT, nor of the RS Government. [It] was a personal view and not that of the General Director*".

Constitution

Carl Bildt, the High Representative, chaired a meeting of the Joint Interim Commission Sub-Committee on preparation for the Post-Election period (JIC-PE) on 30 August. He subsequently conducted a second round of consultations with each of the main candidates for the BH Presidency. Bildt characterised these talks as constructive.

On 27 and 28 August in Sarajevo the Venice Commission delegation (a body of experts in constitutional law) met separately with the Federation and RS constitutional experts.

During the exchange of views the RS representatives accepted the need to modify the substance or clarify the meaning of several provisions in their Constitution which the Venice Commission deemed were incompatible with the BH Constitution. The political bodies of the RS now have to decide on the adoption of further amendments to the Constitution and have indicated that a decision will be taken on 12 September.

Federation

A mixed picture has emerged after the official 31 August deadline for the dissolution of "Herceg-Bosna" (HB) passed almost unnoticed in terms of visible change on the ground. Ivan Bender, Acting President of the "HB" Presidential Council, said in a statement that "HB" would only cease to exist after institutions which would take over its authority were formed. In addition to the dissolution of "HB", the Sarajevo and Geneva Agreed Measures set a deadline schedule, extending until 15 September, for the implementation of the measures and transfer of authorities from "HB" to the Federation.

Joint Bodies

The ninth JCC took place in Jahorina on 3 September. This was the final JCC before the national elections and was notable for its constructive atmosphere. The main themes of the meeting were preparations for the forthcoming elections, post election organisation and the poor human rights record within BH.

The Joint Civil Commission/North West (JCC/NW) Working Group on Refugees and Displaced Persons was held in Banja Luka on 28 August. RS representatives for refugee affairs attended the UNHCR chaired meeting. As well as reviewing progress made and issues which had been raised in the local Working Group meetings, subject-matter also focused on freedom of movement

concerns.

Human Rights

During the past week, Human Rights Coordination Centre (HRCC) staff have pulled together efforts to document and respond to electorally-related human rights abuses prior to the elections. The HRCC has been gathering and assessing information from a wide variety of sources and has hosted a series of inter-agency meetings to discuss ways to improve conditions for political parties and the electorate. The HRCC, through the property subcommittee of the Human Rights Task Force, has also been working with OHR's Legal Department to produce a legal opinion on the entities' property laws.

UN IPTF has demanded the suspension of two RS police officers after an incident in Teslic on 24 August in which two Bosniaks were allegedly expelled by RS police after trying to visit family members there. One victim was reportedly hit by a high ranking police official while being questioned at the station.

OSCE reported that an official of the Kresevo Local Election Commission and a member of the Gunjani polling station committee (both Bosniaks) were arrested by Croat police in Tomici on 28 August whilst returning home from an electoral training course. After a several hour detention the two men were released. In apparent retaliation, three Croats were briefly detained in Fojnica by a group of uniformed men and released after a few hours.

Attacks and threats on minorities have continued throughout BH. Also of concern are recent reports of beatings in police custody in Doboj, Kula and Konjic. A series of hand grenade attacks in Mostar, in addition to ethnically motivated beatings and evictions, have also been reported. Inter-ethnic tensions in Sarajevo, Gracanica, Gorazde, Brcko and Grbavica have resulted in human rights violations in these areas.

In one serious incident on 29 August, OSCE, UNIPTF, and other international organisations reported violent clashes between Bosniaks and RS police in the village of Mahala after RS police fired shots and attempted to evict the Bosniaks from their homes. 46 RS police were detained by IFOR troops and weapons from both sides which should not have been taken into the ZOS were confiscated. The RS police action was condemned by the UNIPTF, UNHCR and IFOR as wholly inappropriate.

In response to the arrest of the RS policemen in Mahala, hundreds of people surrounded the Zvornik UN IPTF station and prevented UN and OSCE staff from leaving the building. UN vehicles at the site were smashed and torched whilst RS policemen reportedly did nothing to quell the violence. The situation was defused after the RS Minister of the Interior and the UN IPTF Commissioner visited the scene. After high-level protests by international officials, RS Acting President Biljana Plavsic reportedly gave assurances that further incidents of this kind would not occur.

Mine Issues

The last Mine Clearance Policy Group to be held before the elections convened at the OHR on 29 August. It was noted that bridge demining projects in Visko and Illijas will commence shortly while the 4.8 km rail tunnel in Caparde has now been demined. Also of note:

- The last batch of 7294 minefield records will be delivered this week to the Mine Action Centre for addition to their database.
- The ARRC Mine Awareness Training Team is now established and available for training NGO and civilian organisations.

Humanitarian Affairs

The establishment of the Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)

ante-mortem data base is fully underway with the first group of 30 interviewers now trained and collecting data. PHR are confident that most of the data will be collected and processed by the end of January 1997. UNHCR has been asked to be the long term repository for the data.

In a joint statement signed on 26 August in Sarajevo, Kresimir Zubak, President of the Federation of BH, Ejup Ganic, Vice President of the Federation of BH, and Soren Jessen Petersen, UNHCR Special Envoy, collectively called upon the cantonal Ministries and the Municipal authorities of the Federation to respect the return and repatriation of refugees and displaced persons to their homes of origin and called upon the respective officials to take immediate measures to enable this to occur.

A meeting in Osijek (Ilidza municipality) was held on 30 August between about 50 representatives of the displaced persons' community and remaining Serb residents. Present at the OHR-chaired meeting were representatives from the Ilidza Mayor's Office, members of the Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs, as well as representatives from the Federation Ombudsperson's Office, OSCE, IPTF, and UNHCR. The greatest accomplishment of this first inter-community meeting was a frank, and sometimes heated, exchange between the DPs and Serbs about prejudices and efforts to learn to live together. Participants exchanged views on housing, employment and security problems, and discussed the possibility of establishing an inter-ethnic community board.

Economic Assistance

Deliveries of almost one half of the livestock earmarked for the Emergency Farm Reconstruction Project have now been made to BH and are currently completing a 30 day quarantine period. As well as the consignment of 1,500 cattle and 1,000 goats, contracts for farming machinery have also been awarded and

signed, with delivery scheduled for the end of 1996. These efforts form part of an ongoing US$ 50.4 million project to jump-start farm production, improve food security, and create employment and income for the war affected rural population.

Looking Ahead

- **5 September:** Peace Implementation Council Steering Board Meeting at OHR, Brussels
- **5 – 12 September:** Sir Arthur Watts will conduct a fourth round of discussions on succession issues. He will meet separately with all 5 delegations in Brussels.
- **7 September:** Contact Group Meeting, Frankfurt
- **7- 8 September:** Informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Tralee

See our Calendar for a full list of activities

The OHR Bulletin is produced by the Public Affairs Department of the Office of the High Representative in Sarajevo and aims to give an overview of what is happening on the ground in the civilian implementation of the Dayton Agreement. Suggestions and contributions are welcome and should be addressed to the Public Affairs Department of the Office of the High Representative in Sarajevo (387-71) 447 275 ext. 562, Fax (387-71) 447 420. Callers from outside BH dial via Brussels switchboard: Tel. (32-2) 737 7500 & Fax (32-2) 737 7501