

# OHR Bulletin 36 – February 11, 1997

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## **Mostar**

- A recent increase in tensions in Mostar culminated on 10 February in a serious incident in which one person was killed and 21 people wounded. According to reports from UN IPTF and SFOR officials, a group of about 500 Bosniaks who were heading for the Liska cemetery in west Mostar were blocked by some 700 Croats. The Bosniaks were going to the cemetery to mourn their dead on what was the second day of the Islamic religious holiday of Bairam. Violence then erupted between the two groups which resulted in the death and injuries. Although full details of the incident have not yet been established, IPTF and SFOR officials confirmed that shots were fired from the Croat side during the clash.

A series of high level meetings took place immediately following the incident in an attempt to defuse the situation and find the causes for the event. The High Representative, Carl Bildt, and his Principal Deputy, Ambassador Michael Steiner, were in contact with responsible authorities both in Sarajevo and Mostar. Ambassador Steiner went to Mostar and held meetings with SFOR and IPTF, Mr. Orucevic the Deputy Mayor of Mostar, Mr. Silajdzic, Co-Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Mrs. Fatima Leho, the Cantonal President. Meetings were also held with the Mayor, Mr. Prskalo, Mr. Leutar, Deputy Minister of the Interior and Police Minister Coric. In Sarajevo Mr. Bildt met with General Crouch as well as Prime Minister of the Federation, Mr. Bicakcic.

The outcome of these talks was agreement among all those consulted, including the Federation President Mr.

Kresimir Zubak, on a package of measures, the main elements of which were:

- The immediate imposition of a curfew, with patrolling by IPTF and an increased SFOR presence around Mostar.
  - Agreement on an immediate investigation by IPTF drawing on evidence from all sides.
  - Any persons found to be involved who held an official position would be removed from office and face criminal proceedings.
- UN IPTF reported that 26 Bosniacs were evicted by "*criminal elements*" in the west side of the city on the night following the violence. IPTF eviction teams will respond to the alleged evictions and are expecting the Mostar police to provide assistance in doing this. IPTF officials also demand that anyone found in the apartments of the evicted should be taken into custody for questioning. In his meeting with Mostar Mayor, Mr. Prskalo, and the Police Minister Mr. Coric, Ambassador Michael Steiner was given a firm promise that these evictions would be reversed immediately.
- These latest incidents follow a recent rise in expulsions, robberies, threats and violence in Mostar in the last few days, including a report of 7 explosions in west Mostar and along the former confrontation line on 6 February .
- The High Representative, Carl Bildt, issued a statement condemning "*in the strongest possible terms*" the indiscriminate killing in Mostar. "*This is murder and must be treated as such. We demand that those responsible for these brutal acts are identified, arrested and brought to justice*", he said. The statement also appealed to all responsible citizens of Mostar for calm and dignity. "*Do not let the extremists destroy the peace that you can build together*", he warned.

## **Brcko**

- On 11 February an extraordinary Joint Military Commission (JMC) was held in Sarajevo in light of recent evidence that reservists had been called up and that the highest levels of requests had been made since the end of the war for authority to move and train. Lt-General Cordy Simpson, Deputy Commander of Operations, chaired the meeting which was attended by RS Chief of General Staff, General Colic, Federation Army Commander General Delic, and Federation Army Deputy Commander, General Budimir. Due to the general volatility of the current situation, particularly in the run-up to the announcement of the arbitration result, and in view of the situation in Mostar, the Chairman outlined two new measures to deal with potential threats:

1. With immediate effect all training and movement requiring authorisation under the Instructions to the Parties would be suspended, and all troops would have to return to barracks by 1200 hrs on 13 February. This suspension would remain in effect until further notice.
2. All those reserves that had been called up were to be stood down and returned to their places of residence by 13 February 1800 hrs. In future, SFOR approval would have to be sought and obtained 21 days in advance of any reserves call-up.

The army Commanders gave their assurances that they would comply with the new measures.

## **Vienna**

The HR, Mr. Carl Bildt, attended an OSCE Permanent Council meeting in Vienna on 6 February, at which he noted with satisfaction the progress that was now underway with the Rules and Regulations for the municipal elections. Underlining the challenges and work that still had to be achieved, Mr. Bildt

stressed that ultimately it was *“quality in the elections and firmness after the elections [which would] be the key to carrying through this most important aspect of the peace implementation process this year.”* Recent events in Serbia had shown that elections were one thing and implementation another. *“One without the other only produces instability, strife and conflict”*. Mr. Bildt also stressed the importance of the over-all media climate in the country. *“The work of the OBN network of independent television stations is key in these respects,”* he said.

## **Federation**

Following a failure of the Federation Government to reach agreement on municipal reorganization at their 6 February session, Croat representatives abandoned the meeting. The Government representatives were unable to agree on the adoption of a draft law for constituting seven new municipalities, as well as changing the borders of the Jajce municipality. The Croat deputies had urged the adoption of the law which Bosniac ministers refused to accept, arguing that the proposal for forming new municipalities satisfied only national criteria. Croat representatives countered that the law's adoption had been refused on political grounds.

## **Republika Srpska**

The RS National Assembly held its fourth session on 7 February in Jahorina. The session considered 24 agenda items, including a programme of the Assembly's activities for 1997. Proposals regarding Laws on the Government and its Ministries were also considered and subsequently adopted. The most problematic issue was the location of the Government.

## **Joint Bodies**

At the Council of Ministers (CoM) Session held on 6 February

no final agreement was reached on the Rules of Procedure. Disagreements on the powers of the deputy Ministers and their voting rights were the main stumbling blocks. The Principal Deputy High Representative Ambassador Michael Steiner, who also attended the session, said after the meeting that *"the voting right belongs to those who are members of the CoM who, apart from the Co-Chairs and Vice-Chair, can only be the Ministers. The Constitution is clear on that."* The CoM did, however, agree on draft laws relating to economic issues and concluded that the Working Groups had accomplished a lot so far with work on the Quick Start Package. The next CoM session will be held on 13 February, which is the date set for adoption of the Rules of Procedure.

## **Right to Return**

- The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies announced on 6 February the release of their publication *"Going Home – A Guidebook for Refugees"*. The booklet is meant as a practical tool for refugees and displaced persons who are considering to return to their original abode.

The publication, which was produced by the International Federation Delegation in BH with funding from the British Government's Overseas Development Administration via the British Red Cross, and the Danish Government's Danida (via the Danish Red Cross), provides practical advice on how to return, what to expect on arrival, human rights, regaining lost property, the danger of landmines and many other issues. It is hoped that the information in the books will provide answers to questions frequently asked by refugees and internally displaced persons. The book will be distributed free of charge in refugee hosting countries as well as within BH.

Daniel Prewitt, Head of the Delegation, said the booklet

was not an attempt to convince refugees to go home but *"to help people to make an informed choice – whether that is to return or to stay where they are now."* It is believed that repatriation should take place on a voluntary basis. *"Any premature, forced mass repatriation could create new humanitarian tragedies,"* said Mr. Prewitt, adding that there were people who would be willing and able to return now if only they knew how to handle the practicalities. *"For them, this book should come in handy"*, he said.

All organisations wishing to participate in the distribution of the book are invited to contact the International Federation in Sarajevo on (387-71) 666 010; 666 013; 200 149 or 200 150

- President of the Stolac Municipality, Mehmed Dizdar, wrote an open letter to the OHR and other international organisations on 11 February announcing that the planned return of refugees to the town of Stolac, scheduled for 14 February, would not go ahead. Mr. Dizdar said that there was an infinite number of reasons why they would temporarily have to give up the idea and cited some of them. These included the recent incident on 31 January when an attempt to return 9 Bosniac families resulted in resistance from Croats who assaulted them with eggs and stones at them, as well as the latest incident in Mostar. Mr. Dizdar also cited the recent house burnings and the inability of politicians to implement promises as reasons for not going ahead with the returns to Stolac. He called for greater efforts from state and political leaders and from competent international factors in creating a favourable political climate which would allow returns to take place, warning that the alternatives would be catastrophic.
- UNHCR estimates that between 200,000 and 250,000 refugees returned to BH in 1996, but 1,030,000 more

remain sheltered in other countries, whilst 600,000 remain internally displaced within BH itself.

## **Council Of Europe**

The Chairman of the [Council of Europe](#)'s Committee of Ministers Deputies, Ambassador Tom Gronberg (Finland) and the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers' Deputies Rapporteur Group on relations with Central and Eastern Europe, Ambassador Horst Schirmer (Germany) visited BH from 6-9 February.

They met with the Presidency of BH, representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Council of Ministers. President of the Human Rights Chamber Prof. Peter Gerner, Ombudsperson Ambassador Gret Haller, the Federation Ombudsmen, and members of the international community, including Principal Deputy HR, Ambassador Michael Steiner, Head of OSCE Mission, Ambassador Robert Frowick, and UNHCR Special Envoy, Carol Faubert.

The purpose of the visit was to reaffirm the political interest of the 40-nation Council of Europe in co-operating with BH. The visit also offered the opportunity to assess co-operation projects already initiated and consider needs for further assistance. BH applied for membership of the Council of Europe in April 1995. In early '97 the Committee of Ministers decided to give high priority to BH in its co-operation and assistance programmes, with the aim of inter alia helping to build democratic institutions, establish the rule of law and protect human rights.

## **Human Rights**

- International organisations and the Federation Ombudsmen's Office will hold a human rights training seminar for chiefs of police working in the Zenica-Doboj canton on 17 February at the Hotel International in



Zenica. The seminar will provide an overview of the international legal framework for the protection of human rights, the legal system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and principles of democratic policing. Similar training seminars have also been offered for police and municipal officials in the Una-Sana canton, including on protection issues by UNHCR.

- OSCE reported that the international civic education consortium Civitas, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, USIA, and the Centre for Civic Education, has launched a project to implement the teaching of civic education and human rights in 300 Federation schools. Civitas plans to train 900 teachers, develop and test teaching materials on human rights, and introduce a pilot project to teach human rights and democracy in elementary and high schools throughout the Federation.

## Media Issues

- A radio dialogue entitled *"The Media on Mostar"* was held on 5 February at the Hotel Ero in Mostar. The roundtable featured media personalities from both east and west sides of the city and was broadcast by Radio FERN.
- The newspapers Feral Tribune (Croatia), Oslobodjenje (BH) and Nasa Borba (Serbia) were jointly awarded the 1997 Plume d'Or by the World Association of Newspapers for their *"courageous struggle"* to maintain journalistic objectivity during the war. The association said the newspapers had managed to *"rise above and oppose racial hatred, heightened nationalism and the policy of war."* The award will be presented at the 50th World Congress of Newspapers in Amsterdam in June.
- The Open Broadcast Network (OBN) continues to expand its original programming beyond the TV-INFO news bulletin, with a strong programme on refugees and displaced persons already well-established, a weekly show on women's issues launched last week, and a political

debate programme, "*Telering*", produced by TV Tuzla. The latter, in particular, attracted wide audience response last week when it featured a rare public discussion between Federation President Zubak and Vice President Ganic.

## **Economic Issues**

- On 6 February Chairman of the Presidency of BH, Mr. Alija Izetbegovic, signed three credit agreements with the World Bank on behalf of BH. Mr. Rory O'Sullivan, Director of the World Bank Resident Mission in BH, signed on behalf of the International Development Association. Each of the three credits, for the Local Initiatives Project (US\$ 7 million), Essential Hospital Services Project (US\$ 15million), and Emergency Industrial Re-start Project (US\$10 million), is designed to address urgent needs and improve longer term economic growth. Mr. O'Sullivan said that the credits were particularly noteworthy because they covered all parts of BH, in both Entities.

Each of the credits is on standard IDA terms, with a 35 year maturity and 10 years of grace. These credits bring the total number of World Bank reconstruction projects to sixteen. (For more information about each project please consult OHR Bulletin 30, December 20 1996).

## **Looking Ahead**

### **17-18 February**

Plenary meeting on Succession Issues for the Former Yugoslavia, Brussels

### **22-23 February**

Coalition for Return Meeting, Tuzla

### **25 February**

Governing Council, Open Broadcast Network, OHR Brussels

## **13 April**

Scheduled visit to Sarajevo by Pope John Paul II

See our [Chronology](#) 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 [civilian implementation](#) of the [Dayton Agreement](#).

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