Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR	Avis Benes	• Systematization in HNC • OHR fully supports the work of Ombudsman's office • Update on October PLIP statistics • OHR congratulates Bajram
OSCE	Richard Medic	• MIFI signing in Capljina • OSCE congratulates Bajram
SFOR	Maj. Fix	• No statement

Avis Benes – OHR

Good day ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the press conference of the international organizations seated in Mostar.

On behalf of the OHR only three brief issues.

The first one refers to the systematization and rationalization in Herzegovina Neretva Canton, which we mentioned at the last press conference. After his last week's message to the Cantonal authorities, Deputy High Representative Jean-Pierre Bercot is negatively surprised that some cantonal structures are still pertaining on the proposed number which in no way responds to the needed decrease in expenses for at least 30%. At the time when strikes in the Canton are again taking place, children are deprived of education and more strikes are announced, it is indeed irresponsible from the Cantonal officials not to take the crucial matter of rationalization seriously. Systematization cannot in any way mean increase of up to 40% of staff as currently proposed. It is indeed unacceptable the attempt of

obvious manipulation and fraud of public in which there is an alleged decrease of employees. It must be clarified that this is done only compared to the previous drastically increased number, finally resulting again in the increase of employees in most of ministries. Moreover, it should be pointed out that the rationalization should not apply only to ministries, but budget beneficiaries in general. One of the obligations of Cantonal Prime Ministers and Ministers of Finances, as emphasized in the letter of the Principal Deputy High Representative Donald Hays, is to create realistic budgets for the next year, something that this Canton cannot achieve without much needed rationalization.

The second issue is the information that last week, Deputy High Representative Ambassador Jean-Pierre Bercot had a meeting with the Head of FBiH Ombudsman's office in Mostar, Ms. Amra Kazic. He expressed his absolute support to the work of this very important institution who is crucial in protection of human rights and fight against discrimination of all kinds. He also expressed the expectation of the OHR that all institutions and bodies should fully cooperate with the Ombudsman's office.

The third very brief point refers to the latest PLIP statistics as of October 2002. They are available here and on the OHR website. You may have received our press release from yesterday which underlines the final percentages for the BIH Federation and the RS. As of our area of responsibility, you may notice that quite a drastic increase has happened in Mostar municipality South-East and Jablanica. We can congratulate to these municipalities. However, we have to emphasize that this significant increase is not only a consequence of rapid increase of the process of return of property, which is of course present, but is also a result of the change of record-keeping that has been kept up to now in a quite different way. Also, the percentage in the Central Zone would be higher if the way of record-keeping was changed.

That’s all for the time being on behalf of the OHR and let me also say that the OHR would like to wish a happy Bajram to all those who are celebrating. Bajram Serif Mubarek Olsun.

Richard Medic – OSCE

Just one point from the OSCE today.

As part of its implementation of the Municipal Infrastructure and Finance Implementation program or MIFI, OSCE is this morning signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Municipality of Capljina. In 2002, 37 municipalities across BiH have taken part in, while 9 others have completed, the MIFI program. For 2003, 10 new municipalities have been selected to take part in the program. The one year that Capljina has been a member of the MIFI program can be considered to be a preparatory phase – the Memorandum of Understanding to be signed now marks an increased willingness by the Capljina municipal authorities to truly implement the MIFI goals and objectives. In line with the positive outcomes of the MIFI program in other municipalities, the OSCE welcomes Capljina Municipality’s willingness to introduce concrete measures that will enhance transparency, accountability and citizen participation mechanisms.

Just a couple of very short points we have. Some education fact sheets to give out today to those who are interested in the education reform program and some calendars.

Just one more point from the OSCE. As the holy month of Ramadan comes to an end the entire staff of the OSCE Mission to BIH sends its warmest wishes for healthy and happy Bajram. This day reminds us of the universal values of community, tolerance, respect and above all – peace. May these values guide us all through the year to come.

That’s all from OSCE.

Questions

Q: Zvonimir Jukic (Onasa/FTV): Lately, there have been media reports on the idea on abolishment of the current six national municipalities in Mostar and organising Mostar as a single municipality, the way we knew it just before the war. I would like to know the OHR's position on this matter.

A: Avis Benes: The OHR is not aware of and has not received any initiative about Mostar as one municipality. Our Office is currently focused on the work related to the fulfilment of the provisions of the Interim Statute of Mostar as well as its future. That's all.

Q: Martina Bozic (Studio 88): Workers from the field of education from the Croat majority areas of our Canton have been on strike for two days. Yesterday, they were harshly criticised by the Cantonal Government and Ministry of Interior. What is your comment on that?

A: Avis Benes: OHR has not any special comment about it but I will say that this issue must be one of the first priorities of the Cantonal Government to deal with. Given the situation you mentioned, it is even more absurd that the issue the Cantonal Government is dealing with at the moment is how to increase the number of employees in its Ministries.

Q: Martina Bozic (Studio 88): Yesterday they were also criticised by the Cantonal Ministry of Interior, saying that perhaps police officers are in even worse situation than the education workers. What's your comment on that?

A: Avis Benes: It is similar to my previous answer. It is about the same issue, it is about the task and responsibility of the Cantonal Government to provide incomes and revenues to the budget beneficiaries on time.