

Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR	Avis Benes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mostar Commission and the SDA withdrawal
OSCE	Richard Medic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• International community presents plan for integration of Mostar Gymnasia
SFOR	Capt. Magistretti	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MNB SE activities

Avis Benes - OHR:

Good morning Ladies and gentlemen and welcome to yet another press conference of the international organizations based in Mostar.

The OHR continues to strongly support the work of the Mostar Commission and wants to see the current situation resolved and a draft Statute finalized by the end of the month, as envisaged when this process started with the agreement of all the Parties involved.

A lot of constructive work has been done in the Commission; many issues have been agreed upon, so it is difficult to understand why any Party wants to be responsible for undermining such an important process for the City of Mostar. OHR condemns such a lack of responsibility from any quarter.

The OHR finds the decision of the SDA Mostar City board to withdraw from this process confused and lacking consistency. The OHR is concerned that this decision could undermine the progress the Commission has made, putting the entire process at risk of Mostar's regeneration at risk.

The SDA's delegates supported the Commission, recognising that the current situation in Mostar is untenable. They participated in appointing the Commissions members through the Mayor & Deputy Mayors Office and the SDA Party Caucus in the City.

The claim that the SDA considers that the mandate of its members within the Commission is completed defies logic; the SDA cannot reasonably state that the mandate of its representatives is completed, as the Commission is yet to finalise a draft statute.

The Commission was formed to find joint solutions; the fact that the SDA claims that the CD Coalition has found a common position doesn't mean that the goal of a solution with broad based support has been found.

If anything the decision of the local SDA - to take the easyroad, sitting on the sidelines, suggests weakness in their arguments.

The OHR expects that this local level decision will be reconsidered at the earliest opportunity.

Richard Medic - OSCE

One point from the OSCE today and, as you can see, it concerns the Old Gymnasium in Mostar.

The OSCE Mission to BiH has presented officials and citizens of Mostar with a plan for the integration of two gymnasia, currently separated by the Boulevard in the centre of town. The plan sees the 'Fra Dominika Mandica' and 'Mostar First' Gymnasia integrated within a revitalized and modernized Mostar Old Gymnasium, a school that will celebrate its 110th anniversary in September this year.

"The Mostar Old Gymnasium had the reputation of being one of the finest schools in the former Yugoslavia. Now, successor student generations are working in cramped, poorly equipped premises within separate schools, and their education is suffering", said Ambassador Tom Young, Director of OSCE Regional Center in Mostar.

As part of the Plan for integration of the 'Fra Dominika Mandica' and 'Mostar First' Gymnasia, Mostar municipalities

South West and Old Town will be co-founders of the new school, with equal say in its administration, including the appointment of a joint school board and a single school Director. Apart from administrative unification, the plan includes integration of five science subjects, namely mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and information technology. During the first semester, the Cantonal Ministry of Education, in consultation with the pedagogical institutes, will develop a plan for the integration of other subjects.

“Integration is a process that calls for consultation and compromise from all sides,” said Ambassador Young. “It is also a process which the Education Ministries in BiH committed themselves to when they adopted the Education Strategy Paper in November last year.”

The Integration Plan will lead to financial savings for the Cantonal Ministry for Education, savings that can be reinvested into the modernization of the education system. For September 2003, the international community plans to support the modernization of the Mostar Old Gymnasium through providing science equipment, classroom furniture and sports facilities. The international community will continue to work with local authorities to monitor and support the integration process, and to re-establish the school as a centre of excellence.

I’ll just add that I urge you to take the education reform pledges, which is the Strategy Paper. We also have the advertisement that you will have seen in today’s newspapers. I urge you to take those, too. And, of course, you have today’s statement. Thank you.

Avis Benes - OHR:

Thank you Richard. Let’s now hear Capt. Magistretti and SFOR.

Capt. Magistretti - SFOR:

No transcript provided.

Avis Benes - OHR:

Thank you. And now your questions.

Questions:

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): I have two questions for the OHR. As the Mostar Commission continues with its work, there are no longer any Bosniak representatives left. Taking this into account, can we say that the work of the Commission is legal? And another question. According to the information we received from Miroslav Coric [HNC PM], results of the vetting procedure for three ministerial posts’ designates have not yet been received from the OHR. The deadline for this was Monday. Can you tell me what’s happening?

A: Avis Benes: As far as the cantonal ministers are concerned, we expect the vetting procedure to be completed soon. But in spite of this, we wish to reiterate that the work of the Government should continue regardless of the fact the vetting is still being carried out. The High Representative stated recently that there are a lot of things that should’ve been completed and they should obviously sit and get down to work. As far as the Commission is concerned, 15th legal session of the Commission was convened yesterday and there were no decisions made seeing as the members of that Commission decided, in light of the SDA withdrawal, they will seek advice and opinion of the OHR, Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

Q: Senad Efica (RTV Mostar): You’ve just said that the work of the Commission continues. This morning, I found out that Mr. Krpo and Mr. Andric abandoned the work of the Commission, freezing their membership. I’d like you to tell me if this is true and I’d like to hear what the OHR thinks about this.

A: Avis Benes: There is a difference between freezing one’s membership and abandoning the Commission altogether. Also, there is a difference between leaving a session and leaving the Commission. Nevertheless, they should speak for themselves. It’s not our duty to speak on their behalf. Obviously, the information they would give you would be the correct information. Nevertheless, the OHR expects the aforementioned consultations to be fruitful, as well as that they will be helped with SDA demonstrating more responsibility.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): Question for Mr. Richard. According to some unofficial information, two or three days ago, a couple of our colleagues of Albanian nationality were remanded in custody for at least five hours at a border

crossing near Trebinje. They were on their way to a journalists' meeting in Mostar, and they were even denied the use of a telephone, according to the unofficial information I have. Could you confirm this information?

A: Richard Medic: Firstly, can I ask you a question? Have you posed this question to the Trebinje Public Security Centre, or the State Border Service?

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): No, everyone directed me to the OSCE.

A: Richard Medic: I can't say that this is under OSCE's mandate. I think you should refer the question to EUPM because my understanding is that they [the Albanian journalists] were kept in custody by the police. EUPM is here to monitor the police and I think the question should be addressed to them. I'll just add that OSCE's mandate does extend to the rule of law, but this is in relation to monitoring of trials.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar/VoA): I have a question for the OSCE. Could you comment on last night's letter that the Croat teachers' Trade Union sent to your office, an open letter to Mr. Beecroft, as far as I understood, on the Old Gymnasium integration? Could you comment on it?

A: Richard Medic: I am aware of the letter from Mr. Milic, although I have to say I heard about it from the media. If the Trade Union of secondary school teachers working according to the Croat curriculum in this Canton is concerned about Croat teachers in this Canton, I think they should also be concerned about the teachers currently in the Old Gymnasium. My understanding is that there are 26 teachers working in the Old Gymnasium, the "Fra Dominika Mandica" Gymnasium. And the fact is that under this integration plan these teachers will be better off. Currently, they work under poor conditions, they have poor facilities, and enrolment is declining. Obviously their jobs are in jeopardy as a result. This integration plan will *help* them. And I will add one more thing. Obviously this integration plan will be prone to speculation and politicisation, so I call on not only the Trade Unions, but also politicians and the media to get back to the basics of this issue. We are talking about improving the quality of education in the current Old Gymnasium. And I think Mr. Milic's comments don't help the process of education reform in this city.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA): Could I pose a question to the OHR. It's obvious that OHR refuses to talk about its actions in advance, but in spite of that I'd like to ask the following. You've said that the OHR deems the actions of SDA illogical and you condemned them. In earlier cases, when other political parties were acting in a similar manner, the OHR reacted severely removing officials of those parties. Will OHR stick to the same standards this time?

A: Avis Benes: As far as the Commission issue is concerned, I hope it is clear that the OHR has the same criteria. In many cases, and we are all aware of them, of attempts to undermine similar processes, namely when there wasn't enough political seriousness and maturity, the OHR has always had the same way of dealing with them. Among other things, these parties are in a way sanctioning themselves, as they are surely betraying their voters' interests, in the sense of not demonstrating enough political responsibility, and in this case the SDA refuses to participate in something it has taken part in before.

Q: Senad Efica (RTV Mostar): Question for Ms Benes. Are you sure that this decision has been made by the local SDA only? Are you sure they are not supported by their HQ in Sarajevo?

A: Avis Benes: We received a notification from the SDA City Board and not someone else. Whether there is anyone else involved in this matter or not, is nothing to do with us.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): What do you expect from these consultations with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and the OHR? Are we going to have some new principles?

A: Avis Benes: The direction in which the OHR expects the situation to develop is to find a way of solving the present situation, as well as to approach the finalization of the drafting of the new city Statute until the end of this month, as foreseen.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): As far as I know the same obstacles are still in place and these are the issues or territorial organisation of the city and mechanisms of protection of vital national interests. Is it realistic to expect that there will be an agreement on these within the next ten days?

A: Avis Benes: It's surely not up to the OHR to comment on the specific details of the Commission's work. It's up

to them to try to find an agreement and to present it.

Q: Senad Efica (RTV Mostar): You are saying that it is only the SDA abandoned the work of the Commission, but Mr. Krpo and Mr. Andric did the same thing too. Will you be sanctioning them as well?

A: Avis Benes: I think we're talking about two different things, as I stated previously. Moreover, we don't know what sanctions you're talking about. We have already said that the OHR expects this decision to be brought on local level as soon as possible. The only sanctions that we talked about was the fact the SDA is sanctioning itself.

Q: Senad Efica (RTV Mostar): Mr. Medic, I don't believe you found out about the letter from the media. I believe you had the opportunity to read it very carefully. Can you comment on Mr. Milic's comment that Mr. Beecroft doesn't know why the war started in Mostar, that in fact the war broke out in Mostar because no one knows what belongs to whom?

A: Richard Medic: Firstly, I'll reiterate that I hadn't seen any letter from Mr. Milic - no letter was sent to our office. I only found out about the letter this morning from the papers. And regarding Mr. Milic's comments, I don't think they are really worth addressing. And this is what I was talking about earlier: politicisation of an issue that is essentially a human right. Education is a human right, it's not a political issue. That's the only comment I'll make about that letter.