Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR	Avis Benes	• Letter of Croat officials to the HR • Schedule of the HR • PLIP statistics
OSCE	Richard Medic	• Two-Way Street Forum in Stolac • PLI in Prozor-Rama • Guide for demobilized soldiers
SFOR	Lt. Col. Rambaud	• Harvest campaign

Avis Benes – OHR

On behalf of the OHR I have three points for you today.

The first one regards the letter of Croat Cantonal officials addressed to the High Representative. I am not sure to what extent have you been informed about this – last week seven Croat officials from Canton 2, 6, 7, 8 and 10 addressed a letter to the High Representative Paddy Ashdown, requesting a procedure of accountability and removal of Behija Hadzihajdarevic, the Federation Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources Management and Forestry, over the abuse of position and national discrimination, in which they expressed a number of arguments in terms of failures in the work of this Minister. This letter was published in Dnevni List on 28th of June. The HR has received this letter and replied today to the aforementioned officials, informing them that he considers

this issue as a very important one. The High Representative also informed that he decided to forward this letter to the Prime Minister Mr. Alija Behmen, which was done today. Not getting involved as to what extent the claims in the letter are substantiated, the HR expects from the Prime Minister to investigate the claims and send a reply next week.

My second issue regards the schedule of the High Representative. As you probably know, he was in London yesterday where he had various meetings with the British Government and Foreign Office. He is in Brussels today, where he will held talks Mr. Javier Solana and other members of the Board for joint foreign and security policy and other officials. He will address journalists in Brussels at 16.30 hrs. Tomorrow, he is going to Vienna to address the OSCE Permanent Council. This trip was planned earlier and it is not related to the extension of the UN mandate in BIH. However, the position of the High Representative on this issue is very clear, and you can read it in the article which was published in New York Times yesterday entitled "Collateral cost in fighting a new court." It is available here and it was faxed to you yesterday.

Third issue refers to the recent PLIP statistics including the month of May 2002. The statistics are available if you have not received them yet. As you can see, the average in the whole country is 52%, 57% in the Federation, 45% in the RS and 55% in Brcko District. There is certain reason for satisfaction although there are still things that need to be done. My colleague Richard of OSCE is going to speak more about some positive examples. I shall reiterate PLIP statistics related to the part of the RS, which is under our area of responsibility. The rate of property law implementation in Trebinje, Nevesinje and Ljubinje is above average both in the RS and BIH in general. If this trend continues there is a good chance for many municipalities in this region to fully process all requests for repossession of

property by the end of this year. This has to be taken with a certain reservation as some things cannot be planned. One more thing in regards to the property law implementation: namely, we would like to call upon citizens once again to behave in this process in a responsible manner and in accordance with the law. We call upon all those who are illegally occupying someone else's property to vacate it even before they receive an eviction notice. As a reminder, one of the regulations of the law reads that people who are illegally occupying somebody else's property can be fined up to 5,000 KMs, depending on the category of illegal occupants they belong to. In theory, every illegal occupant who receives an eviction notice is eligible under this regulation. Unfortunately, this practice has not become a common practice in this area even though some municipal housing offices have submitted reports to the municipal prosecutors that there have been violations of the Federation regulations. Unfortunately, so far the prosecutors have failed to take any action on this matter. In any case, what is sure is that majority of illegal occupants are actively violating the law and that the only way out of this situation is for them to vacate the property they occupy as soon as possible.

Richard Medic – OSCE

On behalf of OSCE I have three points for you today.

The OSCE Regional Centre Mostar is tomorrow hosting the eighth in a series of meetings between young people and leading local politicians entitled Two Way Street. The forum will take place in Stolac and will be attended by Kemal Isakovic, Cantonal Minister for Justice, and Zeljko Raguz, Cantonal Minister for Health Care and Social Welfare. All media are cordially invited to attend – you can pick up a copy of the media advisories provided.

Secondly, Canton 7 municipality Prozor – Rama, known for having in the past taken a hard-line stance towards returns,

has since become one of the most successful in terms of Property Law Implementation in BiH. Following the installation of a new Mayor in November 1999, housing officials – with the support of OSCE – employed a systematic approach with the real work on PLIP starting in the Spring of 2000. At that time, the rate of property law implementation stood at 39%. After persistent intervention by OSCE and local authorities at the field level, implementation of the property laws was accelerated and the rate of repossession in Prozor-Rama now stands at 93%. As of June 2002, the Municipal administration had only four occupancy right holders and 21 owners waiting to be reinstated to pre-war properties. Progress in this municipality is the direct result of a successful approach – working with local authorities based on intensive and co-operative interaction.

Thirdly, "the Guide" for demobilized soldiers was launched last week in Sarajevo. The book was financed by SFOR and put together by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federation Ministry of Defence as a contribution to the demobilization efforts of the Federation government, now that over 9.000 Federation soldiers have signed demobilization contracts.

The book provides information on training, employment, housing and business credit programs, consulting, laws and regulations, as well as important addresses for relevant institutions. While the handbook is intended for demobilized soldiers, any citizen may benefit from it. A reprint is planned for later this year, which will include updated information on organizations and programs in the Federation. The effort will be repeated in a special edition for the RS, working in co-operation with the RS government.

We have some copies of "The Guide" to distribute today – I urge you to take the time to assess what the book has to offer and to help publicise "The Guide". Copies are now available at all Federation army barracks, OSCE Regional Centre Mostar and

the OSCE Field Offices in Siroki Brijeg, Capljina, and Jablanica.

Lt. Col. Rambaud – MND SE

My statement today will deal with the Harvest campaign.

In the framework of the Harvest campaign and with the help and co-operation of the local population, SFOR MND SE conducted on Sunday, the 30th of June, an operation which aim was to remove weapons and ammunition from the hidden place in Plane region close to Bileca city. I do not want to give all the details here, you have everything on the paper on the floor.

Coming back to the last Harvest campaign conducted by the Division MND SE is very satisfied with the results achieved so far since April 2002. All the results are also in the paper I gave for you. Each weapon or ammunition recovered by SFOR is taking off threat to all people of BIH. Much has been done in this region this year but much more can be done again in the future. MND SE Commander General Sommaire is encouraging BIH citizens to continue co-operating in this way for better future.

Questions:

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): A question for OHR and OSCE. Dragan Covic was nominated as the HDZ BIH's candidate for the BIH Presidency. There is a court proceeding against him being carried out before the Federation Supreme Court plus he was removed by the High Representative from the list of candidates at the last elections because of his involvement in the organization of referendum. I would like to ask if OHR and OSCE have a comment on his candidacy? This morning I talked to Mr. Lozancic, Deputy President of HDZ BIH, who literally told me that on the basis of election law even the names of the war crimes suspects can be included in the candidacy lists.

A: Avis Benes: In any case, I will not comment on the election law. As for the candidacy of Mr. Covic, it is up to the Election Commission to decide whether or not his candidacy can be accepted. The rules for candidacy are very clear. At this point of time I would like to leave this up to the Election Commission.

A: Richard Medic: I will say one thing on that. I agree with Avis – this is up to the Election Commission, neither OHR or OSCE are directly involved with the elections. As far as war crimes suspects on the candidacy lists goes, as far as I am aware, and I would have to look this up, the Election Commission has a definite set of regulations regarding this. I know there is some question as to at what point in the indictment process an alleged war criminal becomes ineligible for candidacy. But if the Election Commission has chosen to put them on the candidacy list I cannot see any reason why they would be ineligible from running for elections.

Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA/BBC): I have a question for Mr. Rambaud. According to some media reports the French soldiers were involved in yesterday's operation into the house of Radovan Karadzic. Could you tell us if SFOR soldiers encountered any resistance and do you view yesterday's operation as successful?

A: Lt. Col. Rambaud: First of all, I would like to say that this action was made at the SFOR level and not at the Division level. The information could come from SFOR. Anyway, what I can say is – it is right, French soldiers participated but SFOR is a multi-national military organization and other nations also participated. Regarding your question, only one person was present in the house and there was no resistance.

Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar): Question for OHR. Yesterday, another press announcement was released by the Trade Union of elementary and secondary education employees from the part of Canton 7 with the so-called Bosniak majority.

As you probably know, they emphasized that they view a new draft budget as a fraud. In their opinion this can be best proven with the salaries anticipated for the education employees. In yesterday's announcement they asked for an action of the OHR. What is the information that you have – is the budget unified or not? What can you say about their request for your action?

A: Avis Benes: I will have to reiterate a number of things that I have said previously. It is not the OHR that is to adopt the budget. It is the Cantonal Assembly, i.e. people who are responsible for adoption or non-adoption of a fraud or not fraud. What the OHR wants to see is a genuinely unified budget, the budget with a fair and proper distribution of revenues which is carried out in a transparent manner. Citizens should exert pressure on their elected representatives, as they were doing thus far, if they are not satisfied with the proposal. As far as I know, the Cantonal Assembly should sit very soon and then things will probably be clearer. But in general the principle that whenever something is not functioning properly the first address is the OHR and the IC is a wrong concept which we do not consider as proper and should not be supported.

Q: Ilko Barbaric (Vecernji List): Question for Mr. Rambaud. In your press release there is still a figure of 9,600 mortar shells. It is known that SFOR is still searching for 4,000 more mortar shells. Are there any results in this search?

A: Lt. Col. Rambaud: The statement made by General Amarger in the past about these 4,000 mortar shells is still valid. We receive many, many phone calls and information on supposed caches. As I told last week we continue to check and to investigate. We have a concrete list of places to check. As you can see on the list, all these information can help us to find some weapons and ammunition reported in this list. For the moment not 4,000 mortar shells. Be sure that we will continue.