Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

Avis Benes, OHR:

Good day to all on behalf of Mostar international organizations. Obviously we are not in great number today. We know that for some of you it is a holiday and a non working day, but we will be very short today, I think.

As far as OHR is concerned, there are two short statements. The first one concerns the High Representative's press conference. The High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch, will hold a press conference tomorrow in Sarajevo, starting at 12:15 hrs. We're coming to the end of the summer, and you all know that the High Representative's mandate has been extended for one more year. The High representative will take this opportunity to look back over the last two years and forward to key areas of work over the next year. So there is an opportunity for some who write a lot about the work of the High Representative and some of you are amongst you, to go to Sarajevo and ask him directly. We all know that lately, some "conspiracy theories" appeared, or the so-called changes in the standpoints of the USA or international community in general, towards BiH. I think it is important that those who write about things like that, about the investigation of the American Congress on the subject of the work of Mr. Petritsch etc. should be so professional to publish the reply/denial when it appears. We cannot talk on behalf of others, but I can for example point your attention to the recent statements of the Deputy Ambassador of the US in BiH, who said that there are no changes of the American policy towards Dayton BiH. It would be professional if there was a report on the alleged investigation, that there should be a story on the denial of

it.

The second statement concerns an event that will take place in half an hour in Sarajevo, which is the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the calculation and the payment of social contributions and levies for the local staff of the OHR. Although the OHR, having the status of an international organization, is not legally obliged to make these contributions, it regards the inclusion of its local staff into the welfare system of BiH as being very important and so OHR will pay appropriate social contributions for all of its local staff. On June 28, OHR signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Ministries of Finance of the two Entities though these MoU's could only enter into effect after the Minister of Foreign Affairs of BiH enters into a separate agreement, recognizing the terms reached with the Entities. Contributions which have been paid since July 1 this year have in the meantime been transferred to a trust account, which will now be transferred to the Entity social benefits system.

That's all on behalf of the OHR today. OSCE has no statement today, so we go on to SFOR.

Capt. Simonini, SFOR MND SE:

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Today I have just one statement for you about the Children's Film Festival. The Obala Art Centar in Sarajevo, from August 18 to 24, will host the Children's Festival as a part of the Sarajevo Film Festival itself. SFOR, when possible, is always ready to assist the social life in BiH. Therefore, MND SE to maximize the opportunity for the youth to participate in the Festival, will provide one 45-place bus per day. Either from Sarajevo or Mostar to the Obala Art Centar. Each Battle Group within our AoR has already been tasked to met Children's Associations representatives to discuss in details about this organization.

SFOR has contracted local civilian companies for the transportation back and forth of the children. In addition, each bus will have always four local chaperons taking care of the kids that will, once in Sarajevo, go under the responsibility of the festival organizers. In conclusion if some of you are interested to report this event, please let us know, we will provide you more data concerning time and location of the buses departure from Mostar.

Thank you.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Zvonimir Jukic, ONASA: In the last session of the Municipal Council of the Mostar Old Town Municipality the Roumel project was confirmed, according to which they will construct at least 200 apartments. OHR gave a waiver for this construction. Is this waiver affected in any way by the fact that the tender was not issued, like it should have been, and by the fact that many regulations were breached ***(NB: bad recording, question is unclear)?***

Avis Benes, OHR: As much as I am aware I think that all procedures about the whole issue of Roumel, in the end were concluded in a satisfactory manner for all parties. I can additionally check, but the last report I have says that this project is in the process and that the obstacles that existed before were removed now.

Zoran Kresic, Vecernji List: I would ask SFOR, since in the past few days we heard a lot of reports from Croatia that the fires from BiH spread into the Dubrovnik county in Croatia. A part of the questions refers to the OHR too, because we all know that the MoU on fire-fighting was signed. Is there any cooperation between SFOR and the authorities in Croatia and BiH?

Capt. Simonini, SFOR MND SE: I don’t know….

Zoran Kresic, Vecernji List: Has anyone asked SFOR for support, as was indicated in the MoU?

Avis Benes, OHR: If I can only clarify one thing regarding this memorandum. The agreement is that if the fire happens on either side, SFOR is contacted to free up the air space, so that the air space can be used for the fire fighting aircrafts from Croatia to extinguish the fires in BiH. The MoU does not demand the direct SFOR participation in actual fire extinguishing. I did not say at any moment that it did not happen. The role of OHR in the whole story was to facilitate the signing of the agreement between all the sides. In a way we were the mediators, but the agreement does envisage neither the informing, nor the participation of the OHR.

Zoran Kresic, Vecernji List: Does it mean there has been no cooperation between the SFOR and the local authorities?

Capt. Simonini, SFOR MND SE: SFOR is always trying to cooperate and be helpful within their mandate. I completely agree with what the OHR has said and I have no further comment.