Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

Ambassador Munro – OHR

I should like to welcome the new Croatian language newspaper, Dnevni List. It should fill an important gap in the media landscape. I do hope that the standard of journalism will be what the public has a right to expect in a democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, there were important consultations at Coventry Cathedral in England last week. Leaders of the religious communities, based in Banja Luka, agreed on a joint statement covering: refugee return, the economy, and a multiethnic society. They called for permits for the reconstruction of all destroyed religious buildings, throughout BiH, to be issued forthwith. Therefore, I have sent this statement to the Mayor of Stolac, expressing my hope, that the round table there on 5 October, to discuss Stolac in the XVI Century, will also turn its attention to the needs of the XXI Century as regards the promotion of tolerance, reconciliation and economic revival. A word about Coventry, ladies and gentlemen. Coventry, like Dresden, was devastated during the World War II. The two cities were twinned before German unification. I should add that I myself was much involved in this work during my time as Deputy Ambassador to the German Democratic Republic. Civic and religious leaders have been working together for the last forty years to spread the ideals of reconciliation which they do indeed practise in Britain and Germany, and they have been working to spread these ideas throughout the world. That is why Coventry was exactly the right place for a meeting of this kind. I should like to pay a particular tribute to the presence of the High Representative in supporting this meeting. However, there is

little evidence of the spirit of Coventry here at present. The latest PLIP statistics reveal poor performance in Canton 7, compared with the Federation as a whole. The performance in Mostar falls woefully short of what is required.

On the economy, I welcome the recent visit by the Federation Prime Minister and his Deputy to Mostar. Their report was alarming. GDP per head in the Federation now stands at US$ 1129, a decline even on 1999, and this figure is just 53% of the GDP of the same area in 1990. Meanwhile, the gray economy is estimated at any grade between 50 and 70% of the total. Meanwhile, since Dayton BiH has received more aid per head than any developing country anywhere since 1945. It is not a rocket science to work out that such economic activity as does exist is largely dependent on the spending power of the International Community. The spending of the International Community is now in decline. This is unsustainable. The Federation's proposals offer a realistic way forward. The establishment of a unified Cantonal Tax Administration is welcome following the unification of the Customs Administration. But the challenges are enormous. So I would like to conclude this morning with an appeal to all those whose main preoccupation appears to be refighting the political and actual battles of the recent past. My appeal to them, to all people is to work with the Federation and State authorities at last to give this country the economy which its long suffering people deserve.

Avis Benes – OHR

Before I give the floor to SFOR, I would like to mention a couple of issues of technical nature.

As for the Property Laws implementation and the latest statistics, I think that your editorial offices have already received them. And I would just add that the implementation

rate in Mostar urban municipalities on both sides does not go over the average rate in the Republika Srpska, which is not satisfying.

Another thing, there is a brochure entitled “From an idea to business” in front of you. I suppose you have already heard about it and seen some announcements about it which was worked out by OHR and Care organization. This brochure includes information on how to initiate, run and develop business activities in BiH and it is meant to serve those individuals who intend to develop small and medium size enterprises. From our side, I would appeal on all of you to take this brochure and inform the public about it as well s support that the POHR gives to the development of small business. Should you require any additional information or if people need a copy of the brochure, contact our office.

Lastly, I would like to mention that the Office of the High Representative has a redesigned and updated Office of the High Representative Web Page, as of Monday. You can find it at the same address as the old one which is https://www.ohr.int. The new Web Site carries more than 6,000 documents. It offers better content organisation and a wide range of new applications, including a full-text search engine, a subscription service for 13 categories of documents and on-line job vacancy application forms.

1st Lt. Euler – SFOR

On Wednesday, 26 September 2001, six persons, including five French soldiers and one local translator were injured in Konjic area, at around 21h30, when their military car felt down into a ravine due to a track slide. MND-SE immediately sent a medical team and two helicopters to administer first aid and to proceed the medical evacuation. The six injured persons have been transported by helicopter to the military

hospital in Europe Base in Mostar and two French soldiers have been evacuated to France for specific care. After a complete medical checking, it appeared that the local translator suffered face injures and one broken arm but the medical authorities expect a rapid recovery. The Commanding General and the whole Division express their sincere sympathy to his family and are looking forward to his rapid and complete recovery. In addition the Commanding General expresses his gratitude to the local population which participated to the alert transmission and actively supported the medical evacuation operation.

During the next month SFOR engineers will conduct bridge inspections in Ilovici, Foca and Donji Bratina. The purpose of these technical and maintenance inspections is to ensure the structural integrity of these bridges. Minor repairs may also be carried out on some bridges. Therefore, some traffic interruptions may occur during these inspections and reparation activities. If you are interested in getting further details, please take a copy of the monthly bridge inspection recapitulative table.

Questions:

Q: Mirjana Simunovic (Croat Radio Herceg Bosna): Minister of Interior of this Canton was supposed to be confirmed by the OHR. You stated that you would provide a response within 48 hours. However, up to date you did not confirm nominated candidates. You did not reject them either. Excuse me, but the impression I am getting is that you are obstructing the work of the Cantonal Government.

A: Ambassador Munro: Well, I am certainly not obstructing the work of the Cantonal Government. The fact is that throughout

the time that I have been in this country the work of the Cantonal Government has been obstructed by successive Ministers of the Interior. But I hope very much that this position will soon change. There is a second point and it is a technical one. That is – the lead on supervision of Ministries of the Interior and police work lies with the United Nations. The powers to approve, to finally approve or dismiss a Minister of Interior or not approve a candidate – they do indeed rest with the High Representative. And I appreciate that this is not an optimal arrangement. But I can assure you that the UN are conscious of the need for a rapid decision in the case of the present candidate. But let me be quite frank. Given that the present candidate was the Chief of Staff of the Minister who resigned on the eve of his dismissal by the High Representative, I think the problems are evident.

Q: Fazlija Hebibovic (Dnevni Avaz): What is evident in the area of Stolac municipality is a paralysis of political life. Three months ago, Mr. Kuzman, the Head of Stolac municipality, started working as a pediatric here in Mostar. President of Municipal Assembly is the Cantonal Minister of Justice. There are plenty of problems in Stolac and I think the OHR should get more actively involved in their resolution. Among the other issues, there is a problem of education. Has OHR got involved?

A: Ambassador Munro: Well, I have a certain sense of disappointment to that question. If I look back on my diary for the period since 1st of June, I should think that hardly a day has passed without me devoting considerable effort to trying to resolve or to promote solution to the problems of Stolac. Unfortunately, one of the reasons for the political paralysis to which you rightly drew attention is that the minority of councilors who represent, what one might call the

opposition in Stolac, prevent meetings of the Municipal Assembly from taking place whenever they think that the agenda or the possible decisions are not to their taste. But this is the principle reason why the Mayor has not been able to make his resignation effective. Now, the new Minister of Justice will have to resign from his position as President of the Municipal Assembly. So it is my hope that with a new President of the Assembly and a new Mayor, that with a new team we will have a new approach. The critical issues at the moment are, if one is to believe people on the spot, religious facilities and education. My own position and the position of the International Community collectively on both these issues is absolutely clear and I see no need to repeat it. But I would draw your attention to what I regard personally as the most important point of my statement this morning –namely, the economy. I cannot understand how people can accept the situation in which their income per head is that of a low performing developing country, whereas they used to live in the country which was an increasingly prosperous middle income country. Ladies and gentlemen, Slovenia is the model to follow. Slovenia's income per head is now ahead of that of several existing members of the European Union.

Q: Julija Gubeljic (HTV Mostar): Currently, over 10 Police Administrations in Herzegovina Neretva Canton do not have Chiefs, and all 10 of them are Croats. This means that the leading positions in the Cantonal Ministry of the Interior are performed by Bosniaks, and they take decisions. Taking into consideration that the principle applied in this Canton is a parity principle, how do you see the solution to this problem?

A: Ambassador Munro: The parity principle cannot be subordinated to the need to maintain law and order. I have already drawn attention to the record of successive Ministers of the Interior. It is the responsibility of, in this case,

the Croat side to put forward credible personalities to fill the existing vacancies, beginning with the Minister of course. The solution lies in the hands of the Croats, nobody else.