

# Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR	Avis Benes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DHR Bercot disappointed with another obstruction in unification of Mostar</li></ul>
OSCE	Zinaida Delic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Call to C7 Education Minister</li><li>• Housing officials to fine double occupants</li></ul>
SFOR	Capt. Magistretti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Correction on article on fire in Koznik</li><li>• MA on informal breakfast with MNB SE Commander</li></ul>

## Avis Benes – OHR:

Good morning ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the press conference of the international organizations based in Mostar. Let me welcome our today's guest, Zinaida Delic, Deputy Spokesperson of OSCE Mission to BiH, who is here with us instead of Richard.

On behalf of the OHR, I have only one point today and the statement will be available in writing later on. It refers to the last session of the Mostar City Council and disappointment of Head of our Office Ambassador Jean-Pierre Bercot, which he considers as yet another obstruction in unification of Mostar.

Deputy High Representative and Head of OHR (South), Ambassador Jean-Pierre Bercot, is strongly disappointed with the fact that the City Council of Mostar didn't have enough responsibility and political wisdom at its last session to make some concrete decisive steps in the unification of Mostar. Namely, at this session of the City Council

preconditions should have been made for the formation of a new single Solid Waste Utility Company according to the proposal of the World Bank which was ready to sign a Subsidiary Credit Arrangement for Mostar in the amount of 2 plus 5 million dollars. I am sure you are aware that 2 million were intended for the establishment of the regional waste disposal and additional 5 from the Global Environment Fund for cleaning of Neretva River. Unfortunately, the proposal submitted by Mayor Jahic at the session was absolutely not in line with the proposal of the World Bank. This is very damaging for the whole city as Ambassador Bercot pointed out to Mayor Jahic few days before the session. There is a real danger of losing the valuable help of the World Bank to Mostar and if this happens, those who are responsible for that should be held responsible by the people of Mostar. Moreover, the CD Councilors also refused to adopt the Transition and Business Plan for the Airport Mostar. This Airport is now to be fully under the City Administration authority, after the municipalities with Croat majority transferred its competencies to the City. The transition plan is needed as SFOR is to transfer the authority over the flight control to the local authorities by the end of the year, of course if the latter show enough interest in running this airport. In sum, Ambassador Bercot would like to remind politicians that citizens are not just an excuse for existence of politicians but that politicians should primarily serve the interest of citizens, which in no way was the case at the last Mostar City Council session. It is incomprehensible that some Mostar politicians have an audacity to prevent Mostar citizens to have better communal services and then to lose a generous offer of the World Bank and to sideline the important issue of the Mostar Airport. This is certainly not an attitude which can lead this city into Europe.

That is all on behalf of the OHR today. Now, I give the floor to Zinaida and OSCE.

## **Zinaida Delic – OSCE**

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be in Mostar today and I must tell you that I envy you for your climate which is much better than the climate in Sarajevo.

On behalf of OSCE I have two points for today. Firstly, our favourite topic – education reform and then a piece of information regarding property law implementation in BiH. The Cantonal Assembly of the Hercegovina-Neretva Canton (HNC) yesterday confirmed the appointment of Mr. Jago Musa as the Cantonal Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport. The OSCE welcomes the new minister, whom we expect to urgently issue the instructions on the administrative unification of two schools under one roof, and to work with other local authorities and the international community towards integration of the “Fra Dominik Mandić” and “Mostar First” Gymnasias.

As for my second point, multiple occupants must leave the property they are illegally occupying or face heavy fines. All multiple occupants, who do not voluntarily vacate the property they occupy, within the 15 days prescribed by the decision issued by the housing officials, can be fined between 250 to 5,000 KM. Upon the expiration of the 15 days deadline, the housing authorities can immediately report the multiple occupants to the competent body who will fine them. Housing authorities at all levels must take all necessary steps to ensure that multiple occupants are fined if they do not vacate the occupied property. At the municipal level, housing authorities need to be clearly instructed to report such cases to the competent bodies, as well as the Entity and Brčko District authorities who need to make sure that those bodies function effectively. It has been more than four years since the property laws were initially passed in BiH, and multiple occupants must comply with the laws. It is unacceptable for them to simply wait for the housing officials and the police to knock at their door. Such behaviour needs to be sanctioned.

With the recent amendments to the property laws, the procedure to fine multiple occupants has been harmonised between the two Entities. The PLIP agencies now urge all the competent housing authorities to make extensive use of such provisions. The agencies involved in the Property Law Implementation Plan (PLIP), OHR, OSCE, UNHCR and CRPC call upon all multiple occupants to voluntarily vacate the properties they currently occupy, before they are fined and evicted.

That would be all. Thank you.

**Avis Benes – OHR:**

Thank you Zinaida. Let's now hear Capt. Magistretti and SFOR.

**Capt. Magistretti – SFOR:**

Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning.

Yesterday newspapers reported that an SFOR helicopter flying over the city of Konijc and, throwing a smoke grenade, put on fire a forest on the mountain Koznik. After an accurate investigation, I can say that no SFOR helicopters were flying and SFOR was not conducting any exercise as well in the area. Today SFOR will conduct a recce fly over this region to see to what extent the fire caused the damage.

I would like also to remind you that we will have an informal meeting with the Commander this Friday. All media are invited in our base at 9 o'clock. Please contact us at 352 064 which is our phone.

Thank you

**Avis Benes – OHR:**

Thank you Tomasso. And now your questions.

**Questions:**

**Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar):** Avis, could you comment on the

work of the Commission – namely, the deadline is to expire tomorrow, as it is known, Bosniak members withdrew from the Commission as well as one Serb member. Will the High Representative now impose a solution? Or will the OHR perhaps exert pressure on the Commission to complete this job even though there is not much time left?

**A: Avis Benes:** What I can say at this moment is that the Commission's session is scheduled for tomorrow and the OHR is waiting to see what its outcome will be. Also, the OHR believes that it would be really helpful if the remaining Commission's members would try to put together proposals submitted so far. However, we would not like to speculate about this any further.

**Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar):** To what extent will tomorrow's session be legitimate given that representatives of at least one nation will not participate?

**A: Avis Benes:** In any case, we do not want to speculate about something which might or might not happen.

**Q: Senad Efica (RTV Mostar):** I would like to know what is the OHR's position on Mostar Gymnasium as so far we heard only OSCE? Will a joint Gymnasium on the Boulevard start functioning in September?

Additional question about the same topic for OSCE – as far as I know, the OSCE sent a letter to Mladen Margeta, Head of Mostar South West, regarding the unification of the Gymnasium. Could you tell us what actually you did ask from Mr. Margeta?

**A: Avis Benes:** I have a very brief and clear answer on behalf of the OHR. The OHR fully supports OSCE's positions regarding Mostar Gymnasium. For all additional details, you should address my colleagues from OSCE.

**A: Zinaida Delic:** I would like to try to answer and thank you for this question. As for the letter itself, I do not have an

information that such letter was sent. However, what I can tell you is that last week OSCE representatives met with the Heads of both municipalities and one of the points discussed at that meeting was which steps and actions need to be taken in order to fulfil all necessary pre-conditions for administrative unification of the two Gymnasiums. I would like to add that OSCE expects representatives of Mostar Municipality South-West and Steering Board of "Fra Dominik Mandic" Gymnasium to take all necessary steps in order to take a decision on the administrative unification of these two schools.

**Q: Senad Efica (RTV Mostar):** Have you received approval of Mostar Municipality Old Town?

**A: Zinaida Delic:** I am afraid I do not have that information. I would have to check and get back to you after the press conference.

**Q: Amela Rebac (Studio 88):** First question I have goes to Avis. You said that all proposals for unification of the city submitted so far should be integrated. Taking into consideration that some Commission's members stated that the work of the Commission is illegal and illegitimate without representatives of one nation, regardless which nation, I would like to know what you expect from the Commission? To simply read and present all the plans for the unification of Mostar or do you expect from them some concrete conclusions, or something else?

**A: Avis Benes:** I would not like to talk too much about the expectations; I would like to say that enough constructive things have been made in the work of the Commission so far. We expect that three-month long work on the creation of a new Statute of Mostar will not be lost in these new developments.

**Q: Amela Rebac (Studio 88):** Members themselves consider the work of the Commission to be illegal as there are no

representatives of two nations: Bosniaks from KCD, there is no Braca Andric who is a Serb representative. Members themselves consider the work of the Commission to be illegal. Who will take a decision?

**A: Avis Benes:** It is, of course, very legitimate and grounded question concerning the scenario of the entire future work of the Commission and developments to that regard, but what I can tell you at this moment is that the OHR expects to see what will happen at tomorrow's session of the Commission.

**Q: Amela Rebac (Studio 88):** Question for OSCE – you said you expect a new Education Minister to urgently issue instructions for administrative unification. I just want to know how urgent it should be – by the beginning of the school year, first semester, or next year?

**A: Zinaida Delic:** I think the most accurate answer would be urgent-urgent. By signing the Education Reform Strategy Paper, BIH authorities committed themselves to take necessary steps in that regard. Meetings between cantonal and Federation Education Ministers were held recently at which the issue regarding issuance of instructions for administrative unification of 'two schools under one roof' was discussed. Unfortunately, so far it was done only by Zenica-Doboj Canton. As far this Canton is concerned, it was needed to wait for the official appointment of Education Minister in this Canton by the Cantonal Assembly. It was done yesterday and what we expect now is to see these instructions issued as soon as possible in order to proceed with this process.

**Q: Stanislava Maric (Croat Radio Mostar):** Obstructions regarding establishment of a joint utility company coming from one side have been obvious for quite some time. It culminated at the last City Council session. The deadline given by the World Bank is approaching. I would like to know if the High Representative would do something in order for us not to lose the World Bank's credit?

**A: Avis Benes:** As for the WB's credit I really think you should directly ask them as to what their decision will be. I think that you are all very well aware that the deadline is expiring tomorrow. It is really regretful that some politicians in Mostar are not aware of the importance or perhaps intentionally do not want to receive such a valuable donation and credit for the City of Mostar. And, as I previously said, the proposal was completely different from the initial World Bank's proposal and it presented a one-sided attempt to make a public company the agency for employment of only one ethnic community in Mostar. But, if that was the decision of officials responsible for Mostar, if that was the decision of the City Council of Mostar, then the City Council of Mostar should bear full responsibility for that and it should be resolved between the World Bank and the City Council.

**Q: Mirsad Behram (RTV Mostar):** You have stated today and the OHR did it on a number of occasions that a lot of progress has been achieved in the work of the Commission so far. However, some Commission's members stated for our TV that they could not even agree on the first sentence of the Preamble and that there was no sign of progress. Could you comment on that?

**A: Avis Benes:** Simply, the OHR's assessment was that the progress was made. Of course, one is entitled to have a different opinion. However, we are not here to speak on behalf of the Commission's members, they should speak for themselves.

**Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA):** It seems that as time is passing by problems in Mostar are being multiplied. We heard that Mr. Bercot criticised Mr. Jahic; earlier we heard that the OHR assessed the boycott of the Bosniak members of the Commission as obstruction of its work; also, we heard the IC criticising the Croat side for hesitating to integrate Mostar Gymnasium. Can we expect some concrete action of the International Community instead of rhetoric reactions?



**A: Avis Benes:** Was this a question for OHR?

**Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA):** Yes.

**A: Avis Benes:** In any case, this is an important, key and turbulent period in Mostar. Many important things are happening. The Commission for creation of Statute of the City of Mostar has stirred the spirits in Mostar; some prefer status quo; many are afraid of changes and responsibility. What can be said on behalf of the International Community is that the IC invested so much time, finances and efforts in Mostar and paid too much attention to Mostar and surely it will not give it up. However, you are all aware that concrete measures are not announced in advance but when the time comes.

**Q: Amela Rebac (Studio 88):** All High Representatives form 1996 on, including the present one Mr. Ashdown, were imposing various laws, changing the Constitution, removing officials, etc...Can we expect a concrete action in Mostar given that it is a part of the HR's job description?

**A: Avis Benes:** I have just replied to that question.

**Q: Amela Rebac (Studio 88):** As I said, the High Representatives were imposing laws and changing the Constitution. I expect something concrete to be done in Mostar as well. You are talking about irresponsible officials, people who do not know their job and saying they should take all the responsibility.

**A: Avis Benes:** As far as I am aware of the political theory, politicians are exactly elected to take responsibility when it comes to the decision-making process, not to serve as decorations. In any case, your expectations will be conveyed...

**Q: Amela Rebac (Studio 88):** You mean fulfilled?

**A: Avis Benes:** No, that it not what I said. I think my previous answer was also answer to your question.

**Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X):** When I am talking about the Commission's work I am primarily talking about the OHR's assessments of the Commission's work. The OHR's assessed the work of the Commission as constructive while the facts are quite the opposite. Since the very beginning of its work, the Commission was facing certain obstructions. SDP did not even participate in it; Bosniak members withdrew. There are currently three proposals that have been presented to public. As it seems to me, the members did not manage to agree on a single thing...

**A: Avis Benes:** Is there a question?

**Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X):** Yes, there is – I want to know why you do not that the Commission for creation of the draft Statute of Mostar is a failure and why you do not prevent this agony? Why do you expect some miracle to happen tomorrow and that the Commission will take some decision when it is obvious that it will not happen? Technically, the Commission cannot meet tomorrow.

**A: Avis Benes:** Thank you for the question and the political comment. Let me be clear and allow me to clarify certain issues which should not be distorted. Nobody said that a miracle should be expected tomorrow and nobody tried to perceive things through 'pink glasses.' I would really like to ask you to convey statements accurately. Nobody stated that the work of the Commission was constructive all the time but that certain constructive solutions have been made. All of us are very well aware that there have been and that there are many difficulties in this regard.

**Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X):** My second question regards Mostar City Council session and the issue of Mostar airport. Does the OHR know that there are ownership issues regarding the Airport and Komos? As far as I was informed, the Airport has not been registered even though the management had 60 days to do so.

**A: Avis Benes:** The OHR does not want to go into details. What is the fact and consequence of developments at the City Council is that credit of the World Bank was put in a real danger by the proposal which was absolutely different from the World Bank's proposal. There was enough time to co-ordinate all aspects of this issue as well as the issue of the Airport. We do not want to get into concrete details of these problems. What is the fact and consequence for the citizens of Mostar is that very important issues have been left aside which are surely very significant for all citizens of Mostar regardless of their nationality.

**Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X):** Does the OHR have the same position as the World Bank? This is very important question given that the World Bank is the international financial situation and the OHR is a political organization in BiH. Do you have the same position?

**A: Avis Benes:** You're right in describing characteristics of these two institutions. However, I am sure you understand I cannot speak on behalf of the World Bank.

**Q: Faruk Kajtaz (Youth Radio X):** We know what is the position of the World Bank. What I am asking is – do you have the same position?

**A: Avis Benes:** As you could hear at previous press conferences, the OHR advocated for and supported the World Bank's proposal in resolving of this issue.

**Q: Senad Efica (RTV Mostar):** One more question please. Is it correct that Ambassador Bercot is leaving Mostar because he failed to do his job? Is this information correct?

**A: Avis Benes:** There may be a possibility for you to learn in the near future more about the future plans of Mr. Bercot. As for the OHR's work and activities, they are absolutely co-ordinated at the BiH level and everything which is being done is a part of the fully co-ordinated OHR approach.

**Q: Senad Efica (RTV Mostar):** Does it mean that he is leaving or not?

**A: Avis Benes:** At this very moment I can neither confirm nor deny this but I can tell you that you will get an answer to your question very soon.