OHR’s Statement at the International Agency’s Joint Press Conference

Cooperation With the ICTY

First a word on the weekend exercise in the RS undertaken by SFOR and the RS police. The High Representative has stated on many occasions that the detention of war crimes indictees and their transfer to The Hague is essential if real reconciliation is to be achieved in BiH. It is also an international obligation of the BiH authorities to assist in this detention. The trial of those indicted of war crimes, and this applies in particular to wartime leaders such as Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, is the only means of establishing individual responsibility for, and allocating appropriate punishment for war crimes, releasing any one people from an unjust burden of collective guilt. The High Representative notes that the RS police participation in this weekend’s action indicates that the RS authorities are at last beginning to fulfil their legal obligation to cooperate fully with the ICTY, and expects this cooperation to intensify until Karadzic is caught.

High Representative’s Letter on Mostar Issue

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, has responded to a letter sent to him on 9 January by Deputy Chair of the Federation House of Representatives Josip Merdzo and Canton Seven Prime Minister Miroslav Coric. In their letter, Mr Merdzo and Mr Coric outlined their thoughts on the pending question of the Mostar Statute.

In his response, sent today, the High Representative expressed his hope that the two outstanding issues – the election system

and the question of whether the Municipalities should be kept – can be resolved by consensus. He reiterated his determination to secure such a resolution and said he was prepared „to go the extra mile“ to achieve this.

The High Representative also noted that if no consensus is reached within the next two weeks or so, a decision will nonetheless have to be made in time for preparations to begin for the October elections, and he will have to take the appropriate steps to ensure that this is done.

The High Representative said he has asked a team of experts to further examine the proposed election system in light of HDZ comments on this issue. However, he added that if the HDZ chooses to use the argument that in Mostar a “Bosniak vote is worth more than a Croat Vote” then the same argument must be applied elsewhere in BiH. Logically, the conclusion would be that in BiH as a whole, a Croat vote is worth three or four times more than a Bosniak vote when it comes, for example, to elections to the BiH Presidency. The High Representative asks whether the HDZ can reasonably object in Mostar to a system from which Croats benefit in BiH?

The HDZ’s position appears to be that the interests of minority peoples in Mostar can be adequately addressed exclusively by exercising Vital National Interest. This, the High Representative points out, is a rather surprising view coming from the HDZ. The High Representative cannot understand why the HDZ finds it unacceptable for other peoples in Mostar to have the multiple safeguards that it demands for the Croat people in BiH as a whole.

The High Representative notes that, the HDZ accepted from the beginning, the principle that, in the final settlement of the Mostar question, no single people should be allowed to dominate the city. In the view of the Commission there are no means to do this other than through the electoral system. If the HDZ has concrete proposals for an alternative means of

achieving this, consistent with the basic principle already agreed by the Parties in the Commission, the OHR would be glad to hear these proposals.

You can find copies of the High Representative's letter on the table outside.

PDHR, PM Hadzipasic, Canton PMs to Meet at OHR

This afternoon at the OHR, Federation Prime Minister Ahmet Hadzipasic and Principal Deputy High Representative Don Hays will chair a meeting of all ten Cantonal Prime Ministers. Finance Minister Dragan Vrankic and Energy Minister Izet Zigic will also take part. The object of this meeting is to explore the ways in which cantons can optimize their ability to foster economic reform and economic development. This will be a practical two-hour session. It will conclude with a press conference, at 3.30 this afternoon, at which the participants will announce, among other things, what they plan to do in order to speed up the re-launch of the BiH privatization process. I've brought a long a media advisory with the details.

TV Subscription

The OHR regrets the Federation Government's inability yesterday to agree that the telecom companies should act as collection agency for the RTV subcription fee. Putting in place an effective subscription system is an essential part of ensuring that BiH has a financially and editorially independent public broadcasting system. This is a key conditon of the European Commission's Feasibility Study, and is therefore a priority for further European integration. We are confident that the Federation Government does not want to become an obstacle to this country's path to Europe, and we encourage them to reach a solution as soon as possible in the interests of all the citizens of BiH