

Press Conference by the High Representative

Topic: PIC Conference in Brussels

CPIC Sarajevo, May 25, 2000

Alexandra Stiglmayer (AS): I apologise for the delay. We have just come back from Brussels and are running late with everything. As you know, the theme of this press conference is a discussion of what was discussed in Brussels, and Ambassador Petritsch is willing to answer your questions and give you his impressions of the Conference. So, if you could take over...

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch (HR): Thanks Alex. Well, you are most likely already aware of the conclusions of PIC Conference in Brussels. Just to repeat them because I believe it is very important to keep them in mind:

Economic reform: There are two key words that need to be remembered. This is “reform” and “private investment”. Otherwise, due to declining foreign aid, the already very weak economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina will run into serious, very serious problems. I would not even hesitate to say that there could be economic catastrophe. So, real, fundamental economic reform is the key message that is supported by the PIC.

The second strategic priority is accelerated return. The figures for the first couple or three months are quite promising. We need to support this because this year and next year are decisive years in terms of return. We need the people back now, we need to re-establish people back in their original homes, we need to enable them to access their apartments and their private property. Their rights must be respected – I cannot repeat that often enough. We must keep this in mind. This is part of a wider project for a democratic

Bosnia and Herzegovina. The refugees, the displaced people have a right to return, they have a right to their property. This is also the essence of the Rule of law, or, as you say in your language, "To je sustina pravne drzave."

And thirdly: This is the agenda of strengthening the Common Institutions so that Bosnia and Herzegovina can represent itself in international relations and integrate into European structures. This is a simple requirement; it has nothing to do with ideology or with nationalism. Every country in the world needs a minimum of a central government. Due to the highly decentralised Dayton model, we need efficient state institutions. This is in the interest of all three constituent peoples here in this country. Otherwise, there is not going to be a modern democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is not going to be a Bosnia which can successfully take part in the European integration process.

These three strategic priorities are the framework for the establishment of a functioning state. We need to remember that Bosnia and Herzegovina has to become a normal state, in many respects just like any other state – a state that really deals with the every-day problems of its citizens, and does not only concentrate on issues that do not really serve the people.

These three strategic priorities are of course reflected in the PIC Declaration and the Annex.

I got the fullest support, I must say, from everybody attending the Conference, and I had many meetings apart from and outside the Conference with the major delegations, the major actors and players there. We now have re-invigorated the process here, the peace implementation process, which is very important.

However, this also means that I expect you to contribute to the implementation of this agenda. I expect the politicians who were present there and all the other ones who were not

present there – unfortunately, some of the ones who were present were there only briefly -, that they enforce what is now in front of them. I expect the citizens to make a sensible choice in the elections and to entrust politicians with the implementation of this agenda who really deserve their trust.

Let me also say a word to the media in this country. We'll not be able to communicate with the citizens; we'll not be able to convey the message from Brussels to the citizens of this country without your help. So, the role of the media in the implementation is of utmost importance. I do hope that I can count on your support. You have a huge responsibility and a real stake in the success of these endeavours.

The overriding themes and topics, the issues that have come up time and again were: Number 1, the 50 countries and agencies that constitute the Peace Implementation Council are getting fed up. I had the greatest problems to explain to them why we still need their support, their financial support and their political support. You need to remember how long it took the International Community to get engaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to stop the war here. It would be a big mistake for the International Community to stop now, short of success. But on the other hand, you must understand that many people in other countries that are financing this have their own problems and do not want to be bothered with your problems. If they do not see that there is progress in this country, they will put pressure on their politicians to stop supporting BiH. This is not just rhetoric what I am telling you here. I had many meetings in Brussels, I met on Monday the 15 EU foreign ministers when I addressed the so-called General Affairs Council of the European Union – Robin Cook, Joschka Fischer and so on. They all expressed their greatest concern about the pace of peace implementation and said they would no longer be patient. This is a very important message and needs to be kept in mind.

The second over-riding and over-arching issue was the lack of

willingness of the politicians of Bosnia and Herzegovina to really get their act together and work for their people. This is now known all over the world: that the politicians here in Bosnia and Herzegovina are doing a lousy job. I know, this is a very strong word that I am using, but I am just quoting several of the delegations that indicated to me they would no longer bear with this kind of non-commitment, of irresponsibility that prevails in the political class in this country.

The third over-arching issue was that the three priorities must be implemented immediately and without any tolerance for non-implementation. This is a new seriousness that the International Community is espousing. There is now definitely zero tolerance for the procrastination that might be still ongoing in the minds and heads of some of the politicians here. There is not going to be any tolerance any longer.

I was also reassured that the work of the OHR, the work of the international agencies here, is very much at the centre of appreciation. Actually, all the delegations commented in a very positive and supportive way on the work of the international agencies here, and this is of course quite reassuring and important.

As you know, I now do not hesitate to perform a very hands-on job here. I would just like to remind you of the entity banking laws that I amended. The recent dismissals should also be seen in this context. Dismissals didn't stop with the 22 dismissals some months ago. This is an ongoing exercise. I will not hesitate, over the next months, to use my powers. This was requested time and again by the delegations. You can ask the few politicians who attended the meeting from Bosnia and Herzegovina, how insistent the delegations were about this.

So, I think I should stop here. I would just like to reiterate that I sincerely hope that I will get your continued support

in conveying this message. This is a very serious, very straightforward and open message to the people. We, they – we all need to be faster. We all have to take this job very seriously. Thank you.

AS: Do you have any questions?

Vedran Perisic, OBN: What do you think about the nomination of the new Chairman for the Council of Ministers? What do you know so far about him?

HR: Well, I was informed by President Izetbegovic on Tuesday about the choice that the Tri-Presidency has made. The first reaction in Brussels, from the Peace Implementation Council, was: "Tusevljak- who?!?" Nobody knew him. I was trying to find out who this candidate actually is, and to my own surprise and the surprise of the delegations, even the Bosnian delegation that was present there did not know this candidate. So I am asking myself what kind of candidate he is. I saw a half-page CV. This was basically it. But everybody whom I asked, including the Serbs in the Delegation, did not have any first-hand knowledge of the candidate, which is quite surprising. It is also surprising that the candidate has so far not yet responded to our invitation for a meeting with my people. I am just quite surprised and wondering how this can work. Because, the prime minister of any country, apart from being usually already well known, is the one who should reach out. He is the one who represents the country internationally. He should be the main and the key player in the political process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am wondering how this will develop. I am patient, I am waiting and looking for more information about this Mr. Unknown.

Vedran Perisic, OBN: Do you think this is obstruction of Dayton Peace Accords – the nomination of Tusevljak, somebody that nobody knows?

HR: I would not say it is obstruction. But it is – in general

political terms and by taking international standards of politics into account – a rather unusual thing to do. Under the concrete circumstances of a country like Bosnia and Herzegovina, which urgently needs to move ahead, it is even more surprising, of course.

Aida Cerkez, AP: Ambassador Petritsch, what does this tell you about the Presidency, particularly about its member Zivko Radisic, who is proposing this Mr. Unknown? How would you assess his work regarding this issue? Unusual, it is, but it could be all kinds of other things: it could be great, it could be bad – if you could be pretty specific. Because, Mr. Tusevljak is not known to us either. We do not know him. We are talking now about Zivko Radisic, who is creating this situation.

HR: First of all, I would not want to comment on Mr. Tusevljak himself because I do not know him. As I said, I am still waiting for some information about his career. I do not want to criticise somebody who I do not know – somebody I do not know anything about.

I am basically critical of the process of selection. I will just give you one example. If I have to choose a new member for my team – and you know this is an international team, so many candidates are thousands and thousands of kilometres away from Sarajevo -, I fly them in, we have a vetting process, we have a committee that interviews the candidates, then they make proposals to me, I talk to the candidates, and then we make a decision together. Compared to a prime minister, this is not such a big thing, the Office of the High Representative. The more in the case of a prime minister: he should be carefully chosen, and this is not obvious here. This is the big criticism that I have, and there I agree with you, this is the Presidency's fault.

Where I disagree with you is just to focus on Mr. Radisic. Because, this is a Presidency consisting of three politicians,

and right now the acting President is Mr. Izetbegovic with added responsibility. We are talking here about consensus. Consensus also implies co-responsibility for the decisions. Mr. Izetbegovic and Mr. Jelavic cannot just walk away from this decision. They are part of this decision and thus have to share the responsibility for their choice. This is very important to note here. Otherwise, the system here, between the three communities, will never work. You need to take co-responsibility for the decisions of the two other ethnic communities. This is the spirit of Dayton. Otherwise you will never have the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, the responsibility lies clearly with all three Presidency members.

Jamila Milovic, Radio Mir: Ambassador, you mentioned that the growing impression in Brussels was that politicians are doing lousy job resulting in donors fatigue and people being fed up. Could you tell us: the politicians that attended the Brussels Conference, do they, in your opinion, belong to the group of politicians who are doing lousy jobs? Could you be more specific? What level, lower or higher, are we talking about?

HR: Let me give you one answer to this. I am not into name-calling. It would not make sense to now single out individual politicians in this respect. I think everybody knows what he, or she, in politics is doing, or not doing rather. Therefore I would not want to go into name-calling.

AS: Could you please introduce yourself when you are asking questions, so that Ambassador knows whom he is speaking to?

Amra Kebo, Oslobodjenje: Ambassador Petritsch, every time after a peace conference, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina had new hope, but unfortunately, as you have just said, the leadership of this country is not very co-operative. So, what makes you believe that now it will be different, or that it can be different with the current leadership?

HR: First of all, when we talk about the leadership, we will

always find politicians here and there, even in this country, who are trying to do their job. It is the overall system where one blocks one another – that is the big problem here. Second, I, as a democrat, really believe that vote can change the situation. Already in the last elections, the local elections, we saw that the people are much further advanced than the traditional parties and movements in this country. The next elections in November will give the population of this country yet another chance to make the right choice. This is my hope.

Amra Kebo, Oslobodjenje: If I may just follow-up. Is there any chance for presidential elections, although Ambassador Barry said there wasn't?

HR: Well, I would not want to comment on this. The presidential elections, as we have agreed, should take place as scheduled in the year 2002. It doesn't make sense now to discuss this issue.

Jadranka Milosevic, RTV BiH: Mozete li kazati, nakon ovog sastanka u Briselu, da li je izvjesna donatorska konferencija u Junu mjesecu?

HR: Donatorska konferencija u Junu? There was no talk about a donors conference. I had a very important meeting with representatives from the World Bank. You know that the World Bank is heavily engaged here and will have a say about this, whether there is going to be a donors conference, yes or no. But for the time being at least, there is no talk about it at all. This is also part of the overall dissatisfaction with the performance of this country. It would not be a good idea even to raise this issue now because I am pretty sure there would be a negative response from most of the donor countries. It is in the interest of this country to first try and really get some progress, prove to the world that there is another Bosnia here, that there is a positive thing at work here. And then we might be able to talk about it. But more important than aid, for the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is investment. To

concentrate on economic reform makes more sense than to talk about the possibility of yet another donors conference. Your country has received more aid than any other country has ever received. It would be a good idea now to really and fully concentrate on economic reform, on private investment, to get the necessary legislation in place, deregulate businesses, privatise and thus attract international investment. This is much better than any new aid or any new donors conference.

Darija Seto-Sucic, Reuters: Ambassador Petritsch, how do you plan to achieve this very ambitious plan of economic reform, which is set in the Annex of this Declaration in Brussels yesterday, because, as we are aware, preparations for privatisation started three years ago, and only three to four percent of the companies have been sold so far. Now we have deadlines which are quite ambitious, the abolishment of the payment bureaux is also ongoing. So, do you think that by sacking Bosnian leaders or some officials who are disobeying, or by imposing laws, progress can be achieved? Or what is the way you plan to achieve it?

HR: The urgency and necessity for changes is now obvious. The message that came from the Peace Implementation Council is such that I am pretty sure and quite confident that it will contribute to an acceleration of the privatisation process and of the reform measures that are now in front of us. In this respect I will use all my powers that are at my disposal. I will do my utmost in order to get more investment-minded people into this country, and to encourage local investment. There is a wealth of people here, of young ambitious people who are just waiting to get a chance to set up a business or do something. All in all, I believe the potential is there, it just needs to be activated. And this is what we are going to do.

?: Will you still have a regional approach to the problems in Bosnia? When you say: "We gonna try to get investment-minded people to Bosnia", are you going to suggest to these people

where to work and with whom, having in mind that different regions and different areas in Bosnia do not respond to the Dayton Peace Agreement, to the overall process, in the same way?

HR: Well, the answer is very easy. Businesses will only go where they can find a climate conducive to investment. If there is obstruction, it is absolutely against any business interest. This is almost something like a natural program that goes on. A businessman will go to a town, look at the regulations, talk to some of the politicians there, and then immediately sense whether there is a chance or there isn't a chance for him to do something there. Modern economy is in many ways self-regulatory. We do not need Dayton for this, in fact. There is, regardless of Dayton, simply a rule in modern economy – that businesses only go where they find a conducive environment for them, a conducive legal environment, political environment, ethnic one, everything, of course. Otherwise people will not go there and invest.

Mirsad Bajraktarevic, Radio Fern: U Briselu je bilo govora i o stanju medija u Srbiji. Mozete li nam malo pojasniti, da li je, sta je zakljuceno, osim dakle onog zakljucka, i kakav je vas stav o tome?

HR: The Peace Implementation Council is of course not just interested in the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina itself. There is always a wider view to the region. The Peace Implementation Council is acutely aware that many of the issues that are still unresolved in this country are connected to external factors, as I always called them. On one hand, you have Croatia; on the other hand you have Yugoslavia. With the political changes in Zagreb now, things are moving into a very positive direction, including for the media. Free and independent media in Croatia have a positive impact and influence onto Bosnia and Herzegovina and not just the Croat group here in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In general I believe the influence is very positive one. Not so with the situation and

the influence from Yugoslavia, as we know. The latest crackdown on the few remaining independent media in Belgrade – Studio B, the Anem chain, B92, and so on – has of course consequences for the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and thereby the wider region. Therefore I fully support this declaration, and I am very glad that the Peace Implementation Council is realising that there is a regional dimension to many of the problems and issues that we are discussing here.

Vedran Perisic, OBN: Ambassador Petritsch, do you believe that there will be some major changes in this country, like in Croatia, unless there are some huge, major changes in Yugoslavia, like Milosevic is gone? Do you believe there will be some major changes in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the political level?

HR: Yes, this is possible. I think the more the politicians and people of Bosnia and Herzegovina concentrate on their own problems, their many indigenous problems, the more successful and the more independent they are going to be of the problems that are sometimes spilling over into your country. Bosnia and Herzegovina can make progress. By working hard on reconciliation, by working hard on the implementation of the Dayton Accords, this could be an example for the people in Serbia to look for changes in their own country. I believe there is an interaction between these two countries, but, on the other hand, you here have a chance to do your own job and to do it right, and this in turn will have a positive impact on the overall regional situation.

AS: So, no more questions? Thank you very much.

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