Transcript of Press Conference by Carlos Westendorp, Mostar, Hotel Ero, 30 June 1999

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Chris Riley, OHR (S): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for coming. There will be a short statement by the High Representative, Ambassador Carlos Westendorp and there will be time for a few questions. Ambassador.
Carlos Westendorp: Thank you very much for the attendance. I have come to Mostar after the different meetings of the Federation Forum and efforts of Mr. Schwarz-Schilling and the constant pressure of the OHR (South) in order to make this Canton and this municipality working. I have noticed a clear improvement of the atmosphere and different people in touch are cooperating and working together. The security situation of the Canton and of this city has improved and I can see a lot of elements of hope in the civil society with whom I have had a very pleasant lunch right now.

The main question now is how to make the institutions work properly. For this reason I have had meetings with the Canton 7 authorities. Although they are cooperating and they are working, the results are far from being satisfactory. Today we have conducted positive discussions and the difference of opinions has been identified, I can see that there is room for compromises. With all these elements, I am confident that in the coming days we can find solutions to issues which were blocked for several years.

I have also had discussion with the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor of Mostar. We have reached solutions to most of the issues and we congratulate both of them for their constructive approach. We have been asked for a continued support by the OHR and both of them, in spite of some statements in the press, have agreed that the work of the OHR (South) in respect of the refugee returns is satisfactory and I firmly believe that the Agreement and the Addendum are going to be honoured in the coming months and that the return process is going to be speeded up in a satisfactory manner. So this is in a nutshell a positive result. I believe in the coming days you will see that there is movement in the right direction. Some laws which are outstanding will be put to the approval of the Assembly and I am personally engaged, together with OHR (South), to make this process forward. So, all in all, despite the difficulty of the issues, I think a clear progress is ahead of us. And the authorities should not miss this opportunity.

I told the representatives of NGOs that they are really the cement of the construction of the re-building of the civil society in this country. So, the authorities of this country will follow with this wish of the civil society to work together towards reconciliation with the respect of the cultural identity of all the constituent peoples.

Thank you very much. I am ready to answer your questions.

Chris Riley, OHR (S): Could I just ask, for the benefit of the High Representative, to identify your name and organisation? Questions?

Mirsad Behram, RTVMO: My question to Mr. Westendorp is the following one: You have just said that some issues will be solved very soon, issues that have been blocked for some years. Could you be more precise? The solutions to which issues can we expect in the days to come?

Carlos Westendorp: Well, you know, the main problems are that

the institutions both of the Canton and the municipalities and the city of Mostar need to work together, they have to find a common place to meet, they have to find laws with which to work, they need a unified budget, they need a system of courts that really works, they have to appoint judges and the different positions in the cantonal judicial system. They have to start the process of privatisation which is speedy but at the same time transparent and without discrimination.

By the way, talking of this labour issue, I can tell you that I have been having a meeting with the Trade Unions of the Aluminium and the Soko factories. They are demanding that non-discrimination is applied and I think this is written in the Dayton and they will have the High Representative and the whole IC behind them in order to find a fair solution to accommodate everyone without political bias. This is the question of the Grammar School which, according to the Deputy Mayor Orucevic, was considered to be the seat of the common institutions. But according to the general opinion of the people of Mostar, it should be a Grammar School. And both of them agreed on this principle provided that it is not a, let's say, discriminatory school. So these are the main issues we have been dealing.

Zoran Kresic, CR H-B: I will pose a question that is not related to your visit to Mostar today. Journalists are particularly interested in the issue of who your successor will be. Is that Mr. Wolfgang Petritsch?

Carlos Westendorp: Well, as you know, I have been informed that Mr. Wolfgang Petritsch is the proposed candidate of the EU. He is a well-known person because he has been the EU Envoy to Kosovo. Before that, he was Ambassador to Belgrade. And I think he is a very suitable candidate. Now the question is that this proposal of the EU has to be confirmed by all the members of the PIC and, after that , his appointment has to be endorsed by the UN Security Council. I hope that this process will be completed as soon as possible. But so far, there is no

official appointment because all these procedures have not been fulfilled.

Marija Topic-Crnoja, HRT / Erotel: My question refers to your visit to Mostar. From the representatives of the Cantonal authorities we have learnt that one of the problems discussed at today's meetings was the issue of the seal, i.e. the use of the Croatian and the Bosniac languages. We have also heard from them that they expect the assistance from the OHR.

And if I may ask another question that is related to Mostar: the issue of the returns in Mostar is a topic that is frequently discussed. Data show that the Mostar Returns Plan has not been fulfilled. Will the measures that you have announced and specific tasks to be fulfilled in the following days also be related to the issue of the seal and the returns to Mostar?

Carlos Westendorp: Yes, we have been discussing the issue of the seal. I have heard the different positions of the different actors in this process. Now I have a clearer view of the problem. This problem is not only concentrated in Canton 7, but is a general problem. My feeling is that all the languages of this country have the same value and all the languages have to be respected – be it on the seal, be it on the TV, be it on any other official documents – and that the people have the right to learn their own language. And schools will have to do it. But, of course, you know that the problem of schools is a wider one and you have to eliminate the offensive elements against the other people and , hopefully, to find a common curricula all over the country. But this will take a long time.

The immediate solution to the question of the seals – I think I have the elements to produce an agreed solution for everyone.

As for the return process, this is one of the priorities of

the IC and it should be also a priority of this country. Unfortunately, this issue I cannot solve within the coming days because this is an issue you cannot force. This has to come naturally through negotiations. But, I notice some movement on this issue: first of all, that Croats have repossessed their homes in Polje where the work on the houses has already started. And also, by the middle of August, hopefully, about 30 Bosniacs who are currently living in the Buffer accommodation will have their homes in Stolac and Capljina completed. And there is also the project of rebuilding 60 homes for the same constituent people in these municipalities.

These are small numbers, small figures. I would like to have greater figures, but we have to be realistic – this is something that we have to do in a careful manner in order to avoid reactions which will put us back into square one. But refugee returns remains our main priority. I am convinced that B&H will have a solution if there is an element of multiethnicity and co-existence. Thank you.

Pejo Gasparevic, HINA / BBC: According to some unofficial information I received on my way to this press conference, the Conference on the Pact of Stability will be held until the end of July. Is that correct? And another short question; do you expect the possibility that Russia might oppose the appointment of Wolfgang Petritsch as your successor, having in mind his engagement in Kosovo?

Carlos Westendorp: I will start with the easier question, which is your last one. You know that Mr. Petritsch has been working together with the Russian representative Mayorski and with the American representative Mr. Hill. These two important countries know him well and this is the reason why I do not see a problem with any of these countries. And the first question, yes that is the idea which has many fathers, I am one of the fathers but Michael Steiner, who is near Chancellor Schroder is another father. The idea is that the Stability

Pact meeting should take place in Bosnia Herzegovina. For both of us, B&H is the key to success of the Stability Pact. The place chosen is Sarajevo, there is a team coming next weekend to see whether this is feasible to be done in the month of July and if not than later in the autumn. So the exact date is yet not fixed. There are difficulties, logistics, transportation, security, hotels so on and so forth, but I believe that improvisation quality of B&H people are enough to overcome these difficulties because I think that the message we are passing to the region that B&H is a the key to success to Stability Pact and that B&H is going to be one day a member of European institutions is something that is politically very important

Chris Riley: Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry. We ran out of time, the Ambassador has to move on to his next engagement. Thank you.

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