

Transcript of the High Representative's Press Conference with the Minister for Human Rights and Refugees and the Representatives of the Associations of Decertified Police Officers of RS and FB&H

The High Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling

Good afternoon. Thank you for coming.

I will say a few words and then hand over to Minister Kebo and some of the representatives of the decertified police officers standing here behind me.

First, let me say that I fully understand the difficult situation in which the decertified police officers find themselves. The United Nations IPTF performed an important and necessary function, however some police officers were dismissed without the possibility of review or to defend themselves. It is my firm conviction that a solution must be found, which is based on the opinion of the Venice Commission and of the Charter of Human Rights.

I have undertaken a number of steps to try to get this issue resolved. I have consulted closely with the Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers. I have supported the Bosnia and Herzegovina Government in a letter to the United Nations Security Council. I have been lobbying members of the Security

Council to assume responsibility on behalf of the United Nations. I persuaded the PIC – the Peace Implementation Council, the highest body of the Dayton signatories, to support my position in Vienna. Finally, I raised the issue during my visit to the European Union's Political and Security Committee on the 17th of March in Brussels.

But, we must all understand that this objective will not be easily achieved. The United Nations remains the only institution with a mandate to review this issue. But, their position has been that an individual review will be difficult to conduct. It is of course not an answer to the persons concerned here, because every person has a right to justice, to defend themselves and to take all measures in a legal state as it is normal.

So, this excuse of the United Nations will not be accepted by me. Therefore I will go personally to the Security Council in April of this year. The United Nations remains the only institution to do that, so we have to gather all our efforts to convince them. It remains to be seen whether I can persuade the United Nations to change their position. I promise that I will do my best to persuade them that the current position is not sustainable.

I hold a firm principle; in my former years I was the Chairman of the Human Rights Committee at the German Bundestaag, and when I change posts I do not change my beliefs and I do not change my ideas about human rights. Therefore I will stick to that and I will fight till the end on this issue: the issue of the police officers, in the same way as in other questions that affect all other citizens of this country, of Europe, and the world. So you can stand and rely on my efforts and I hope that we will succeed in this year, very soon.

Thank you.

Minister for Human Rights and Refugees, Mirsad Kebo:

Today, together with the presidents and members of the RS Association of Decertified Police Officers and the Association of Decertified Police Officers of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I had an extremely useful and I should say, inspirational, meeting with the High Representative. The meeting was a part of the efforts made by the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in cooperation with the OHR, to come up with a solution to the problem of the obvious violation of human rights of 157 members of the associations of both entities.

I have to say that we have already undertaken some very important diplomatic steps to address that issue. I have also been made aware that many view this problem as being extremely difficult to resolve. I agree and repeat that this problem is very difficult. However, we will certainly not give up. During the meeting we also discussed certain activities that we intend to undertake in April of this year concerning the rights of individual members of the associations of decertified police officers. I would however, prefer to talk about this more at a later date, to be exact, once we see the results our activities so far have produced – that is, once we see what position the UN Security Council takes on this issue.

For us this is not just about 157 people, it is more than that. It is a matter of principle and the government's attitude towards human rights, and therefore it is a test the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina must pass. As a Minister I am prepared to, together with these people, fight till the very end. Of course this means utilizing all international legal institutions, the Constitution, and laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the responsibilities the local institutions have towards these people who are on the edge of existence. What we are doing is really nothing more than reasserting the principle that should apply to all citizens who have been

denied their human rights in this country, which is certainly moving towards the European Union, and has to keep in mind that respect for human rights is crucial in that sense. I am convinced that we will succeed in achieving our aims.

The High Representative has given us his full support, which I never doubted in the first place. We have also received the support of the ambassadors of the largest, most powerful and most influential countries in the world. I am certain that at the talks coming up in New York, we will be able to convince the Secretariat of the United Nations that admitting that a mistake has been made can only assert the greatness of international law.

Thank you very much.

Ramo Suljic, Association of FBiH Decertified Police Officers:

In the name of the decertified police officers of both of the entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina I would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Schilling, the High Representative of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I would also like to underline the following – that this is a significant example of how Mr. Schilling differs from former High Representative Mr. Paddy Ashdown. We would like to thank both Mr. Schilling and Minister Kebo who also attended this meeting today, especially because this meeting represents a significant step forward in resolving the issue of the decertified police officers, which has existed and been a pressing problem for the last four years in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In no way do we doubt Mr. Schilling's negotiating and diplomatic skills. We firmly believe that he will use those skills in order to persuade the representatives of the UN Security Council, The Council of Europe and similar, to, in accordance with the recommendations made by the Venice

Commission, carry out a review of the decertification process.

Minister Kebo is also taking certain steps in relation to the implementation of the conclusions of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In conclusion, aside from the activities Mr. Schilling is conducting at the Council of Europe and the UN Security Council, the decertified police officers – meaning both of the entity associations – are also taking steps towards the realization of the conclusions. We will appeal to the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina to implement the conclusions concerning this issue, which have already been adopted twice. Once again, I would like to express our gratitude to Minister Kebo and Mr. Schilling.

Thank you very much.