

Transcript of the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference

OHR, Mario Brkic

OSCE, Mersiha Causevic

EUPM, Zinaida Ilaria

EUFOR, LTC Rolf Kurth

OHR

HR in Brussels

The HR will today address members of the North Atlantic Council and the EU Political and Security Committee. He will also meet with EU Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn.

Today's briefings come as both NATO and the EU prepare to make assessments of the country's progress towards fulfilling the necessary criteria for entering PfP and embarking on Stabilisation and Association Agreement. In late April, NATO will review the question of BiH's PfP application. Towards the end of May, the EC's Consultative Task Force will visit BiH and assess progress achieved in fulfilling the requirements for signing an SAA.

The HR will outline progress made so far regarding co-operation with the ICTY, noting that the RS government has reversed a nine-year policy of obstruction and has transferred to The Hague six indicted war criminals in the past three months. He will note that this is a significant step forward. He will say that it is crucial that this process continues, and that the RS's efforts do not slacken. Co-operation will not be complete until both Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic are in The Hague . He will say that as the tenth anniversary

of Srebrenica approaches, this requirement will become more, not less, urgent.

While addressing the PSC and in his meeting with Commissioner Rehn, the HR will also focus on police reform. Police reform is one of the last outstanding key reforms required by the EU for BiH to move to negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The HR will note that increasingly discussions on Police restructuring are focusing on the elements of the reform itself; that there is a general acceptance from all sides in BiH that Police restructuring is required and that there now needs to be a move towards formal discussions.

The High Representative will underline that the CTF's timetable dictates that BiH's political parties must be ready to start formal negotiations on police restructuring by the end of this month and before BiH moves in to this crucial period of assessment.

We will have more details from these meeting for you later this afternoon.

OSCE

OSCE on restructuring process of Ombudsman Institution in BiH

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina considers the Ombudsman institution to be fundamental mechanisms for promoting good governance and the protection of human rights in this country. Therefore, this Mission believes it is important that the BiH government respects this Institution as such.

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina also believes that it is vital that the existing structures be consolidated into

a single new national institution with one Ombudsman and two Deputy Ombudsmen appointed through open and transparent procedures. These appointments must be based on professional rather than ethnic requirements or political associations.

Additionally, it will be imperative for there to be a transitional period that ensures a smooth merger of the three current Institutions. These recommendations are in line with those of the Venice Commission with regard to the reform of the current Ombudsman institutional structures. The creation of a single, state Ombudsman Institution for BiH is both condition of the European Commission's Feasibility Study and a post-accession commitment to the Council of Europe.

After the Council of Europe revises the amendments to the Law on Ombudsman, we hope that the draft legislation will be submitted to the Parliament by the Council of Ministers and adopted without further delays. The OSCE will continue to provide its support to all three current Ombudsman Institutions throughout the restructuring process.

Alternative accommodation must not be left out

Last week, the Federation of BiH Parliament adopted the Law on Return, Allocation and Sale of Apartments. The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina welcomes the intention of BiH authorities to regulate the future use of unclaimed apartments, and clarify an important area of the post-property law implementation legal framework.

However, the OSCE Mission to BiH is concerned that the Law, as adopted, fails to address issues repeatedly raised with FBiH authorities since end of 2003.

In particular, the Law fails to take into consideration the Federation's continuing obligation towards legal beneficiaries of alternative accommodation who are currently using unclaimed apartments, as regulated by the Law on Cessation of the Application of the Law on Abandoned Apartments currently in

force in the Federation.

We take this opportunity to remind BiH authorities of their obligations under Annex VI of the Dayton Peace Agreement to protect the human rights of its citizens.

It is acknowledged that many thousands of people in the Federation live in circumstances that fall below adequate standards and that unclaimed apartments represent a significant public resource available to address this problem. Under the newly adopted law, these individuals could potentially be unable to gain access to social housing, which is their right under European human rights norms, making them more vulnerable to further duress and creating a greater burden on local governments to redress their shelter needs.

OSCE Mission to BiH emphasizes that a social housing policy is needed to ensure that (i) the re-allocation of unclaimed apartments does not adversely affect the rights of alternative and emergency accommodation beneficiaries, and (ii) responsible local authorities provide durable solutions to the housing situation of other vulnerable social cases currently neglected under the applicable law.

Given its mandate and expertise, the OSCE Mission to BiH remains committed to these issues, and will continue to monitor these areas, advocate directly with all competent authorities and stands ready to assist wherever possible.

EUPM

EUPM hosts first discussion with law enforcement spokespeople

Strengthening the role and capacities of the law enforcement Spokespeople in BiH will be the main focus of a one-day workshop organized by European Union Police Mission (EUPM) on 6 April in Sarajevo.

More than 30 police spokespersons and their colleagues from the respective Ministries of Interior, from all parts of the country, will hear presentations and discuss topics such as the upcoming police restructuring, the role of the police spokesperson vis-à-vis the spokesperson of the public prosecutor and how it affects their work, in particular in their communication with the public.

During the last couple of months, EUPM worked with the law enforcement spokespeople to identify the main obstacles and challenges that they, as PR professionals face, in their day-to-day communication with the public. A series of workshops and training seminars has been designed in partnership with the local authorities which will be held until the end of 2005. All participants acknowledged the need to further develop public relations culture within the law enforcement structures. EUPM will continue to support such initiatives in the future.

EUPM and OHR continue talking to BiH citizens about police restructuring

The public meetings that EUPM and OHR have organized so far proved to be successful in explaining the main purpose and benefits of the police reform to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina . The citizens' turnout has been significant and marked with lively discussions and debates.

Today, April 5 EUPM and OHR staff will be talking to the citizens of Foca at 1800hrs. in the Cultural Centar. Tomorrow, April 6, a team will be in Visegrad Cultural Centre at 1800hrs. and finally for this week, on 7 April on Pale, in Cultural Centre, starting at 1800 hrs.

One of the purposes of the meetings is to deconstruct the myths linked to police restructuring. Police restructuring is not about abolishing the Entities, or the Entity Ministry of Interiors – it's solely about creating an professional police

service, accountable to the citizens and effective in fighting crime.

EUPM encourages citizens to attend these public meetings to inform themselves of this reform process that is crucial for their future, and to take active part in the discussion. Each public meeting will focus on answering questions from members of the public.

EUFOR

Deployment of troops to EUFOR

550 troops and vehicles from the Italian Alpini Regiment based near Turin began arriving in Sarajevo today. In addition, a unit from KFOR (the NATO Kosovo Force) will also arrive shortly. They are part of a regular exercise to ensure that “over the horizon” reserves are able to respond at short notice to rapidly enhance EUFOR capability if necessary.

EUFOR is a flexible and effective military force with a wide range of operational and strategic reserves available to reinforce at short notice. The Alpini Regiment will be fully integrated into EUFOR and will undertake a wide range of routine operations alongside existing troops, helping to maintain a safe and secure environment and operating in support of BiH Law Enforcement Agencies in their fight against organised criminal networks.

EUFOR is committed to assist these local agencies in their work to strengthen the rule of law in BiH and this is one way in which EUFOR can help. This temporary deployment is part of a planned programme of exercises and is not in response to any increased threat.