

Transcript of the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference



OHR, Mario Brkic

OSCE, Mersiha Causevic-Podzic

EUFOR, Nicholas Foster

OHR

Two Elements Required For Police Reform Agreement

The discussions on police restructuring based on the report of the Police Directorate continue today.

2 March is the deadline for State and Entity governments to sign up to a police reform, and that requires agreement to be reached this week.

At the same time the EC have made it clear that there is a narrow window of opportunity if the SAA is to be signed this year: delay could push back BiH's SAA into 2008.

For these requirements to be met the ongoing discussions— as a minimum – need to produce two agreed elements: first, an agreement on the proposed plan for police reform that is based on the Directorate's report; and second, a clear time line for the implementation of this reform which would produce irreversible steps before an SAA could be signed later this year.

It is clear that the status quo will change, but this country's political leaders must work out how. The International Community will be present at the discussion this afternoon to be able to advise on the proposed solutions' compliance with the three EU principles for police reform.

The OHR welcomes that fact that the country's political leaders have shown a readiness to put the interests of the country and its citizens above all else and are trying to resolve the remaining issues so that BiH has a chance of signing a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU this year.

OSCE

Internships Offer Young People Valuable First-Hand Experience in BiH Parliament

The OSCE Mission to BiH and the Secretariat of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly signed a Memorandum of Understanding on a project to employ volunteer assistants in the Secretariat of the BiH Parliament. As part of the project, six volunteer assistants are recruited to serve for an initial period of six months; three volunteers supported by the OSCE and three by the Parliament.

The volunteers will be supporting areas in which OSCE Mission to BiH is already engaged, namely the European Integration Committee, the Public Information section and the Research Center.

The project gives young graduates the chance to gather first-hand working experience in the State Parliament.

The Judiciary in BiH Must Ensure the Safety of Innocence

In order to assist the judiciary in complying better with international standards, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina produced *The Report on Presumption of Innocence*.

Analyzing adherence to the principle of presumption of innocence in cases before judicial bodies in BiH, OSCE monitoring shows that problematic practices largely take place at municipal and basic court level.

Typical infringements include judges prompting defendants to plead guilty by asking specific leading questions. No person should be considered guilty until finally convicted by a court of law. The citizens of BiH must be on guard against violations of the principle of the presumption of innocence because of the adverse effect they can have on the right to a fair trial. Adherence to this principle is also a fundamental tool for inspiring trust in the rule of law.

The OSCE Mission to BiH also underlines recommendations to relevant actors on how to address the identified concerns. Judicial actors should at all time refrain from taking any action or making any statement implying guilt on the part of the defendant. Actions such as threatening a harsher sentence if the case goes to trial should be avoided.

It is of paramount importance that standards set forth in the Codes of Ethics for Judges and Prosecutors relating to respect of international human rights norms are properly maintained. Therefore OSCE Mission to BiH calls on the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council to investigate cases where judges may have breached the presumption of innocence.

You can download the report at www.oscebih.org.

EUFOR

COMEUFOR's visit to Brussels

Commander of the European Union Force, Rear Admiral Hans-Jochen Witthauer visited Brussels last week for consultations with the Chairman of the European Union Military Committee, the EU Presidency, the EU Council Secretariat and the European Commission.

Admiral Witthauer outlined EUFOR's continuing role within Bosnia and Herzegovina in maintaining a safe and secure environment. He provided the various European organisations with first-hand military expertise and his views on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina prior to the decision to restructure EUFOR, which will be taken later this month.

EUFOR is one example of the EU's long-term commitment to this country. Operation "Althea", EUFOR's mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is currently the only European Union led military mission worldwide. The experience gained during the mission will serve to guide and shape future policy and missions conducted under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

The fact that EUFOR is aligned with, and effectively embedded within the other European institutions makes it unique in comparison with other international military missions.

EUFOR works shoulder to shoulder with all members of the European Union family within BiH including: EU's Special Representative; Police Mission; Monitoring Mission; Commission; Presidency. Such a situation enables a co-ordinated approach throughout the EU Family.

RTQ

Dnevni List, Rešad Dautefendić:

I have a question for Mr. Foster. Did EUFOR participate in this morning's operation in Pale? If EUFOR did in fact take part in the operation with NATO could you give us more details? If they did not participate could you explain why?

EUFOR, Nicholas Foster:

This was a NATO led operation. EUFOR did offer medical services if required, but that was the extent of EUFOR

participation. It was wholly NATO led and NATO generated. That is all I have.