Chronology/Monthly Tracker, March 2002

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March

Summary

March will be remembered as the month in which the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina's eight ruling parties succeeded in reaching a compromise on one of the most important issues for the future of BiH – the implementation of the BiH Constitutional Court's decision on the constituent status of all peoples on the entire territory of BiH. On March 27, after more than 90 hours of exhaustive negotiations under the auspices of the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, politicians representing the SDP (Social Democratic Party), the Party for BiH, and the NHI (New Croat Initiative), signed the Agreement on the Implementation of the Constitutional Court's Decision, also known as the "Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement", in full, and the SDS (Serb Democratic Party), the PDP (Party for Progress), the SNSD (Alliance of Independent Social Democrats) and the SPRS (RS Socialist Party) signed it with two reservations related to two specific provisions.

The Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement spelled out directions for the new constitutional set-up in the Federation and the Republika Srpska, turning the two Entities into multiethnic communities which guarantee the full representation of BiH's peoples and citizens at all levels of government and public administration, and provide them with far-reaching rights in the decision-making process.

The International Community wholeheartedly welcomed the Agreement, saying that it turned a page in the short history of modern BiH. The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, commended the BiH leaders for their "far-sightedness and courage", noting that this Agreement will turn BiH into a truly multiethnic country. The Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement was also hailed by the Peace Implementation Council's Steering Board, the OSCE, the EU General Affairs Council, the US and French Embassies, and the Croatian and Yugoslav governments as a decisive step forward in BiH's democratic development.

While most parties in the Federation, with the exception of the HDZ and the SDA who both did not sign, also welcomed the signing of the Agreement, representatives of the political parties in the RS were somewhat more reserved, saying that the signed document represented a good basis for amendments to the RS Constitution, which would be agreed upon by the RS National Assembly. However, the OHR stressed that nothing short of the Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement will be acceptable. The proposed constitutional amendments based on the principles set forth in the Agreement were to be discussed by the Entity parliaments by April 18, when the BiH Election Commission was scheduled to announce the date for the upcoming general election in BiH in line with the new Election Law, which should reflect the changes to the Entity Constitutions.

March will be significant for BiH for yet another reason. On March 20, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers decided to invite BiH to join the Council of Europe as the 44th member-state. The accession ceremony was to take place on April 24, when BiH would officially become a full-fledged member of this oldest European human-rights organization.

On March 5, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, made his sixth report to the UN Security Council in New York, summing up the progress that has been made in BiH since his arrival. In his address, Petritsch also informed the Council about a reinvigorated program of judicial reform in BiH, which is to restructure the country's court system over the next two years, depoliticize the appointments procedure by introducing a High Judicial Council,

and reform the civil and criminal procedures. The process of judicial reform in BiH is strongly supported by the ruling parties in the Federation and the RS, as well as the Council of Ministers, who argue that only a thoroughly reformed judiciary could effectively uproot crime and corruption in the country.

The UN Security Council unanimously adopted a Resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina, welcoming the EU's decision to run a police mission in BiH as of January 1 of next year, endorsing Lord Paddy Ashdown as the next High Representative for BiH, and expresses its appreciation to Wolfgang Petritsch for his achievements as the High Representative. During the ensuing discussion, representatives of the Council member-states commend Petritsch for the progress made in the past three years in BiH, as well as his "dedication and extraordinary commitment" and noted that BiH is substantially more stable as a result of his work. A few days later, Ashdown visited Sarajevo to discuss the present political situation in this country with the current High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch and BiH politicians. Lord Ashdown is officially to take up this post by the end of May.

Finally, on March 24, Bosnia and Herzegovina won its first Oscar, which means a lot to the citizens of this country. On that night, the film "No-man's Land" by director Danis Tanovic was awarded the Oscar for the best foreign language film. "This is for my country, for Bosnia," Tanovic said as he held aloft the golden Oscar statuette.

Chronology

March 1

· NATO-led SFOR troops in BiH launch a second operation around the eastern town of Foca to capture Radovan Karadzic. The operation takes place only a day after the first failed attempt to arrest one of the most wanted war crimes suspects presumed hiding somewhere in eastern BiH. After announcing that the second search also did not succeed, NATO Secretary-General George Robertson warns that Karadzic and all other suspects will eventually be captured, and he calls on fugitives to turn themselves in: "Time is running out. Surrender!"

· In an exclusive article published in Dnevni Avaz, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana notes that the decision of the EU to launch a comprehensive police mission in BiH, which will continue the work of the International Police Task Force (IPTF), is a clear sign of the European Union's commitment to BiH. "The European perspective that we offer is the best and the swiftest way for your country to get away from conflict and approach a stable and prosperous future," Solana writes in the article .

· Media report that the chairman of the BiH Council of Ministers, Zlatko Lagumdzija, has called for urgent and thorough judicial reform in BiH in order to enable the new Alliance authority to uproot crime and corruption. Lagumdzija said he expects full and decisive measures to be taken to tackle problems in the judiciary, and he promised his full support in this process, which is to be undertaken in full partnership with the International Community. Other BiH and Entity officials, including the speaker of the BiH Parliament's House of Peoples, Sejfudin Tokic, and Entity prime ministers, Alija Behmen and Mladen Ivanic, join Lagumdzija's appeal.

· Some 8,000 war veterans and families of fallen soldiers stage demonstrations in Sarajevo protesting against the new draft law on veterans' rights in the Federation and the general status of this vulnerable social category. The protests are peaceful, although there is an atmosphere of hostility in the group, in particular towards BiH and Federation officials who try to address the crowd. The media and a number of political leaders accuse the main Bosniak party, the SDA (Party of Democratic Action), of manipulating the veterans and politicizing the gathering.

March 2

· In an interview with SENSE news agency, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, stresses that the decision on constitutional change in the Entities and the implementation of the Constitutional Court's decision on the constituent status of BiH's peoples and citizens on the whole territory of BiH must be reached on a local level, that is, by BiH's political leaders. "It would be unacceptable that this issue turns into one more task for the High Representative," warns Petritsch.

March 3

· A meeting on constitutional change among leaders of eight ruling political parties (the SDP, the Party for BiH, the NHI, the SDA, the HDZ, the SDS, the PDP and the SNSD) fails to produce any concrete results as participants reach a consensus on minor problems but clash over several crucial issues, such as the mechanism for protecting vital national interests in the Entities, and ethnic representation in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of authority. While most parties in the Federation continue to insist on identical solutions in the two Entities and the introduction of a House of Peoples in the RS, RS political parties argue that some form of special council should be sufficient to guard the vital national interests of peoples.

March 4

· In an annual US State Department country report on human rights, BiH receives a mixed grade. The report notes that the level of respect for human rights is significantly varies in different parts of BiH and that religious discrimination still poses a serious problem in Serb and Croat-dominated areas. The State Department also reports that the political leadership in the RS continues to obstruct minority returns, does not demonstrate an adequate level of cooperation with the ICTY and fails to secure media freedom and protect the most vulnerable segments of the population. Click here for the full report.

March 5

· In his sixth report since he took up the post of High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch addresses the UN Security Council in New York and describes the progress that has been made in BiH since his arrival. Petritsch also informs the Council of a reinvigorated program of judicial reform, which will restructure the BiH court system over the next two years, de-politicise the appointments procedure through the introduction of a High Judicial Council, and the reform of the civil and criminal procedure codes. Commenting on the ongoing talks on constitutional change in the Entities, the High Representative stresses that "this is a moment when the country must establish internal equilibrium founded on a constructive interdependence of all groups." He also says that political parties in BiH must be given an opportunity to produce a 'home-grown solution' for the benefit of all BiH citizens. (Press Release: High Representative addresses UN SC – March 8, 2002 and High Representative's Speech – March 8, 2002)

· The UN Security Council unanimously adopts a resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina welcoming the European Union's decision to take over the UN's police training and monitoring duties, from 1 January 2003, and endorsing Paddy Ashdown as the next High Representative. The Council also expresses its unanimous appreciation for the achievements of the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, during his mandate in BiH. During the ensuing discussion, representatives of the Council member-states commend Petritsch for the progress made in the past three years in BiH, as well as his "dedication and extraordinary commitment" and note that BiH is substantially more stable as a result of his. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan pays tribute to the High Representative by noting that his "effective leadership helped secure the gains made by the International Community" in BiH in recent years. Security Council members express satisfaction with the current measures being taken to streamline the operations of the International Community in BiH and call on political leaders in BiH to reach a compromise agreement on the implementation of the Constitutional Court's ruling on the constituency of peoples. (Press Release: UN Security Council Debate on BiH – March 6, 2002 and also link to UN Security Council Resolutions on BiH.

· FRY Minister of Foreign Affairs, Goran Svilanovic, arrives in Banja Luka for talks on constitutional change with the RS leadership comprising RS President Mirko Sarovic, Vice-President Dragan Cavic, Prime Minister Mladen Ivanic, RS National Assembly Speaker Dragan Kalinic and Serb member of the BiH Presidency Zivko Radisic. Svilanovic stresses that constitutional change must be the result of agreement reached by all three peoples. "We have no ambitions to play anyone's older brother, since we respect the political maturity of the people of BiH and see them capable of agreeing on how to arrange their own state," Svilanovic says.

· In an interview with AFP, the RS Prime Minister, Mladen Ivanic, dismisses criticism by the High Representative of a lack of willingness by the RS to take an active role in arresting indicted war criminals, stressing

that his government remains ready to cooperate with the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia). Ivanic says he is convinced that the majority of police, ministers and principal members of his government are committed to supporting the arrest of war-crimes suspects, including the wartime Serb leader Radovan Karadzic.

· Several hundred Serb refugees in Bijeljina, demanding an end to evictions of Serb families from this town, stage protests carrying photographs of the most wanted war-crimes suspects Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic vowing not to turn over the two wartime Serb leaders to The Hague Tribunal. At the same time, media report that posters supporting Radovan Karadzic have appeared across the eastern RS town of Foca, whose nearby villages are presumed to be the hiding place of the most high profile war criminal in BiH. The two events come four days after the failed attempt by SFOR troops to capture Karadzic in eastern Bosnia.

· Under OHR auspices, RS Education Minister Gojko Savanovic and Federation Education Ministers Mujo Demirovic sign in Banja Luka an Interim Agreement on the education rights and needs of returnee children throughout BiH. The agreement, which is characterised by the OHR as a major step forward in resolving education issues affecting numerous families in BiH, stipulates that parents of returnee children can choose which curriculum their children want to follow in the "national group of subjects" such as language, literature, history and geography. (Press Release: Entity Education Ministers sign Interim Agreement – March 7, 2002)

March 6

· The BiH Council of Ministers presents an action plan on the fight against corruption, which was drafted as a joint effort by the Council, the World Bank and the OHR. BiH Minister for Foreign Trade and Economic Relations Azra Hadziahmetovic says that for the first time in history BiH has a plan for fighting corruption, which represents the greatest obstacle to foreign investment in BiH. The head of the OHR's Anti-Corruption Department, Manfred Dauster, stresses that comprehensive reform of the judiciary and adoption of the law on money laundering would be a good basis for the fight against corruption.

March 7

· The BiH Council of Ministers adopts a report on CIPS (Citizens Identity Protection System) prepared by a special working group. The report envisages the signing of a contract with the German company Siemens on the delivery of the system which will realise the project. The Council also announces that the estimated cost of the project, which is designed to introduce order to the administrative chaos of identity documents in BiH, will be initially around 33 million KM.

· In an interview with OBN Television, RS President Mirko Sarovic says that he does not believe that the idea of introducing a House of Peoples in the RS will pass because not enough political parties would support this. Sarovic stresses that a form of Council for the protection of the vital interests of peoples in the RS would adequately protect the national interests of all peoples living in the RS.

· High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch visits the "Zene za Zene" workshop in Sarajevo to mark the International Women's Day (which falls on March 8). Petritsch expresses his concern about increased reports of domestic violence, and he encourages women to take a leading role in the future of BiH. (Press Release: High Representative marks the International Women's Day – March 7, 2002)

· Paddy Ashdown arrives in Sarajevo in his first visit to the BiH capital since being formally endorsed as the next High Representative. During his short stay, he meets with Council of Ministers Chairman Zlatko Lagumdzija and discusses the current situation in BiH. Lord Ashdown is officially to assume the post of High Representative at the end of May.

· The Economist publishes a piece on the Balkans, stating that "the Balkans have recently been doing remarkably well" and, on the part of the International Community, are run by "a dream team." "Wolfgang Petritsch, an Austrian with useful Slovene roots, has done well as 'high representative' in Bosnia. And Paddy Ashdown – a peer who once led Britain's Liberal Democrats and who, it was formally announced last week, takes over from Mr Petritsch in May – has good credentials for pushing Bosnia further in the right direction," reads the

article .

March 8

· At a first eight-hour session of serious negotiations under the auspices of the High Representative, aimed at producing political agreement on the implementation of the Constitutional Court's "Constituent Peoples Decision, representatives of the eight most important parties in the two Entities outline their positions. Commenting on the talks, Petritsch notes that some progress has been made towards the final resolution of this crucial issue. Party leaders, including the SNSD's (Independent Social Democrats) Milorad Dodik and the leader of the Party for BiH, Safet Halilovic, express the hope that the political leaders will be able to reach a final agreement.

· The Brcko District marks the second anniversary of its establishment as a single administrative unit beyond the control of the Entities and under the sovereignty of BiH. The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, expresses his satisfaction with recent progress in the District and commends its achievements in the past two years. (Press Release: Second Anniversary of Brcko District – March 8, 2002)

· The future High Representative for BiH, Paddy Ashdown, visits Belgrade and meets with FRY President Vojislav Kostunica to discuss the present situation in the Balkans and relations between Yugoslavia and BiH. "Construction of a stable and functional BiH, in line with the Dayton Peace Agreement, respected and intact borders, the rule of law and the eradication of all forms of crime and corruption will be Mr. Ashdown's priorities," the FRY government notes in a press statement after the meeting.

· Media in the Federation report that BiH authorities are to shut down three Islamic charities active in the country after an investigation showed they were engaged in suspicious financial dealings. US-based charities Benovalence International Foundation (BIF) and Global Release Foundation (GRF), as well as Saudi-based Alharamain, are to be banned, as BiH officials say possible links with a terrorist network cannot been excluded.

March 9

· At a press conference in Sarajevo, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDS) appeals to the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, to use his powers and impose amendments to the Entity constitutions that would be in line with the BiH Constitutional Court ruling on the constituent status of peoples in BiH. "It would be a great gesture of honour…Do no miss this opportunity," says Nedim Serija, the general secretary of the LDS.

March 11

· At a session in Sarajevo, the Federation government adopts the draft law on the Federation Intelligence Security Service (FOSS). The draft law envisages that the two existing intelligence agencies (Bosniak AID and Croat SNS) will cease operating within two months from the date the law takes effect.

March 12

· The European Union Presidency strongly urges the political leadership in BiH to ensure the implementation of the Constitutional Court's decision on the constituency of peoples in BiH within the next two weeks. In a statement for the press, the EU says it is convinced that now is the time for the authorities in BiH to show that the country is ready for membership of the Council of Europe and that it remains committed to future integration in other European structures. (EU Presidency Press Statement – March 12, 2002)

· The OSCE Chairman in Office and Portuguese Foreign Minister, Jaime Gama, arrives in Sarajevo on his first visit to BiH. During his stay, Gama meets with a number of leading local and international officials to discuss the situation in the country and address the prospects of BiH's integration in European structures. Gama notes that BiH has decided to move forwards towards becoming a "self-propelled rather then assisted country." "The situation in BiH is more secure, institutions are working better and there is room for a reduced level of international engagement," Gama stresses at a press conference in Sarajevo visit. During a meeting with the High

Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, Gama expresses support for the High Representative's position that BiH political leaders must reach a "home-grown" decision on constitutional change in the Entities. "It is very important that constitutional reform can come about through agreement, through dialogue among political parties on a local level," says Gama in Sarajevo (Press Release: OSCE supports OHR – March 12, 2002)

· At an annual strategic conference in Paris, focusing on "Humanitarian Intervention and Crisis Management: the lessons of the Balkan experience," the Senior Deputy High Representative, Matthias Sonn, sums up these lessons in regard to BiH. (Speech by the SDHR Matthias Sonn – March 12, 2002 and Press Release: SDHR Matthias Sonn highlights the Primacy of Dayton – March 12, 2002)

· A BiH State delegation headed by Chairman of the Presidency Beriz Belkic arrives in Brussels for talks with NATO leaders on the prospects for BiH's integration in Euro-Atlantic structures, including NATO's Partnership for Peace program. The delegation includes the other two members of the Presidency, Zivko Radisic and Jozo Krizanovic, the Entity Defence Ministers, armed forces commanders and their military advisors.

· The OHR, the OSCE and the European Commission announce the re-launch of the Free Media Help Line – a confidential telephone service which provides assistance to journalists and media outlets in the event of threats, intimidation or interference. (Press Release: Re-launch of the Free Media Help Line – March 12, 2002)

March 13

· At the invitation by the High Representative, the leaders and representatives of the eight leading political parties in BiH resume talks on constitutional change in the Entities, at the OHR building in Sarajevo. After this second, eight-hour session, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, says that the talks are moving, albeit slowly, in the right direction, and he expresses the hope that BiH leaders will reach a good compromise solution. "You must be aware that they (political leaders in BiH) have never been confronted with such a monumental task," the High Representative tells the press.

· During a meeting in Brussels with a BiH delegation headed by Chairman of the Presidency Beriz Belkic, NATO Secretary-General George Robertson urges BiH leaders to end the country's dependence on external assistance through state-building and through the closing of ethnic divisions. "The clear message was that BiH had to take ownership of its own future to break the cycle of dependence…and to take its place in the European family of nations," Robertson stresses.

· After a closed session of the Croatian Parliament's Board on Foreign Policy, Deputy Parliamentary Speaker Zdravko Tomac stresses that Croatia will insist on the establishment of a House of Peoples in the RS as the only remedy for peoples living in the Entity which is "a result of crime and ethnic cleansing." RS politicians, including RS National Assembly Speaker Dragan Kalinic, strongly condemn Tomac's statement saying this is the "most perfidious way of interfering in internal issues of three peoples and two Entities in BiH."

· In a statement for Dnevni Avaz, the president of the NHI, Kresimir Zubak, expresses doubt that BiH political leaders will succeed in reaching an agreement on constitutional change in the RS and asks the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, to impose amendments to the RS Constitution strictly following the principles set out in the Constitutional Court ruling on the constituent status of all peoples in BiH.

March 14

· Leaders of the eight leading political parties in BiH and the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, continue talks at the OHR in Sarajevo on constitutional change in the Entities. Commenting to the press on the progress of the talks, which this time lasted three hours, the High Representative notes that the participants have managed to come closer to agreeing on basic issues. He urges political leaders to use the days over the weekend to "narrow the gaps between issues not yet resolved." "The leaders of this country must prove that they are mature enough to find common ground to agree on solutions," Petritsch stresses. Other participants, including the SDA's Sulejman Tihic and the Party for BiH's Safet Halilovic, concur with the High Representative, saying that the positions of parties taking part in the talks are moving closer to each other.

· The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, chairs the first meeting of the Cabinet, which is composed of the heads of international organisations and missions in BiH. The Cabinet and four new inter-agency task forces – dealing with economic reform, return and reconstruction, institution building and the rule of law – are the core elements of the new streamlined international engagement in BiH. These elements were endorsed by the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council. (Press Release: First meeting of the cabinet – March 15, 2002 and PIC SB Communiqué – February 28, 2002)

· Serbia and Montenegro sign a deal to reshape the Yugoslav federation (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) in what international analysts see as a way of reducing Montenegrin demands for independence and preventing a new and potentially violent conflict in the Balkans. FRY President Vojislav Kostunica, Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic, and EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana sign the agreement envisaging a reorganised state called "Serbia and Montenegro" which will remain in existence for at least three years, after which either Serbia or Montenegro could seek independence. The agreement has to be ratified by the parliaments of Serbia, Montenegro and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia before a commission can be set up to draft a constitution for the new state.

March 15

· The BiH Parliament's House of Representatives confirms the appointment of Dragan Mikerevic, the Minister for European Integration, to the post of Chairman of the Council of Ministers as part of the regular rotation in the Council. Mikerevic is to replace Zlatko Lagumdzija, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who had been in this post for the past eight months.

· The Serb Radical Party (SRS) announces it will nominate Nikola Poplasen, former RS President and unrecognised SRS President, for the President's Office in the general elections scheduled for October. Poplasen was removed from the post of RS President in March 1999 by a Decision of the former High Representative, Carlos Westendorp, for obstructing the Dayton Peace Agreement. Subsequently, the Provisional Election Commission denied the SRS certification for both the municipal and general elections in 2000.

March 16

· The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, meets with the founder and the honorary president of the SDA, Alija Izetbegovic, to discuss the ongoing talks on constitutional change in the Entities. During the meeting, Petritsch stresses that constitutional solutions in the RS and the Federation must be symmetric in essence and in principle, but not necessarily identical. Explaining Petritsch's position, Head of the OHR Press Office Alexandra Stiglmayer tells Nezavisne Novine says: "Symmetry implies that solutions have to have the same effect, not that they be identical." She adds that the centralised structure of the RS and the decentralised, Cantonalised structure of the Federation, where many issues were under the authority of the Cantons, prevented identical solutions.

March 17

· During a meeting with representatives of the HDZ in Mostar, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, calls on members of this Croat party in BiH to take a more active role and be more constructive in the talks on constitutional change in the Entities. However, Petritsch also says at a short press conference after the meeting that, regardless of their engagement in the talks, he will ensure that the rights and vital interests of the Croat people in BiH will be adequately protected be they in the RS or the Federation.

· Ahead of a new meeting of the main political parties and the High Representative on constitutional change scheduled for Monday, RS President Mirko Sarovic and Prime Minister Mladen Ivanic announce on the RTRS that if the talks fail, the RS National Assembly will be called upon to adopt constitutional amendments proposed by the RS Constitutional Commission. The two RS leaders unanimously reject any possibility of the High Representative imposing a solution, stressing that RS authorities will not implement "any imposed changes to the RS Constitution."

· In an interview with Jutarnje Novine, the SDP leader, Zlatko Lagumdzija, says he is confident that BiH

politicians can agree on constitutional change in the Entities.

March 18

· Today's meeting at the OHR in Sarajevo among leaders of now nine main political parties (the Socialist Party of the RS has joined in) lasts a record 14 hours, from 10.00 in the morning until midnight, but they still does not produce a final agreement. Addressing the press during the talks, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, notes that the talks have entered a very substantive, if difficult, phase. He expresses confidence that BiH politicians will reach final agreement on this important issue. "This is a group of politicians that is forward-looking," he stresses.

· SNSD President, Milorad Dodik, decides to withdraw from the talks on constitutional change in the Entities saying that political parties from the Federation are too rigid in their positions and not open to any form of compromise. Dodik commends the efforts of the High Representative for "trying very hard to facilitate the agreement." Only two days later, Dodik returns to the negotiations.

· In an interview with CNN, the war-time BiH Foreign Minister and founder of the Party for BiH, Haris Silajdzic, warns political leaders and the International Community against reaching solutions that are not in the spirit of Dayton, and which foster further ethnic division. "Those who committed genocide cannot be rewarded by concessions with regard to the implementation of the Constitutional Court ruling on the constituent status of peoples in BiH," says Silajdzic.

· Representatives of four Croat political parties in BiH – the HDZ's Ante Jelavic, the NHI's Kresimir Zubak, the HSS's (Croat Peasant Party) Ilija Simic, and the HNZ's (Croat National Community) Miljenko Brkic, meet in Sarajevo with Catholic Cardinal Archbishop Vinko Puljic. They agree on a joint position on constitutional change, in particular the demand for bi-cameral parliaments in both Entities.

· Evictions of illegal Croat tenants, refugees from other parties of BiH who resettled in Drvar, become a hot topic in all BiH media after a group of some 15 evicted families leave the town and move to Croatia. Croat parties and politicians voice concern that thousands more Croats may follow suit if forcible evictions aimed at making way for Serb returnees in Drvar are not halted. However, international organizations and the BiH Ministry for Refugees stress that the eviction process in Drvar cannot be stopped and add that all families who have been evicted from this town were double occupants, namely, persons whose pre-war homes had been reconstructed and who had no right to alternative accommodation. (Press Release: Returns process in Drvar – March 19, 2002)

March 19

· During the fifth marathon meeting on constitutional change at the OHR, the leaders of nine political parties in BiH make substantial progress. The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, tells the press that the participants have agreed on some 80% of the issues, while the remaining 20% presents the most difficult part. "However, I am an optimist and I believe that everything will be done well. There has never been more readiness [to reach a solution] and trust among party leaders then now," Petritsch notes.

· In the evening, SDA President Sulejman Tihic decides to withdraw from talks, claiming there is a lack of symmetry between the solutions proposed for the two Entities, which is detrimental for the Bosniaks. He also says the SDA will not accept anything short of a House of Peoples in the RS as a guardian of national interests of all peoples.

· In a letter to the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, four prominent NGOs bringing together intellectuals from all ethnic groups in BiH – the Serb Civic Council, the Croat National Council, the Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals and the Association of Independent Intellectuals "Circle 99" – stress that the full equality of all citizens in BiH can only be secured through a House of Peoples in the Entity parliaments. The four NGOs believe that vital national interests should relate to the protection and development of national identity, culture and cultural heritage, development and use of language, and freedom of religion.

· In a working paper on constitutional reform in BiH, the European Stability Initiative (ESI) stresses that the

High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, should not impose constitutional solutions in the Entities if BiH party leaders fail to agree on this issue on their own, but have it solved after the elections scheduled for October. “The imposition would not transform BiH political life. Instead BiH should be enabled to transform itself from within,” notes the ESI paper.

March 20

· The Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers decides to invite BiH to join the Council of Europe as the organization’s 44th member state. The accession ceremony is scheduled to take place in Strasbourg on April 24, when BiH will officially become a full-fledged member of this oldest European human rights organization. Media report that the decision on BiH’s accession to the CoE was made unanimously by 43 members of the Committee of Ministers.

· The constitutional negotiations under the auspices of the High Representative resume. Today’s talks, which last more than ten hours, continue to be attended by representatives of all nine parties – both the SDA and SNSD send replacements for Dodik and Tihic. OHR Senior Spokesperson Alexandra Stiglmayer says following the session that the participants have agreed on the basic shape and form of the necessary bodies and the mechanisms for the protection of vital national interests, and that they are “inches away from a major political breakthrough.”

· The Peace Implementation Council (PIC) Steering Board at the ambassadorial level meets to discuss the ongoing talks on constitutional change and notes that, in the past ten days, political parties have made genuine progress towards an agreement. The Steering Board stresses that it will insist on solutions that are symmetric in substance, that is, for solutions that will provide for the full empowerment of all three constituent peoples in BiH and both Entities. The ambassadors also urge political leaders to “seize this historic opportunity and take the responsibility and credit for negotiated solutions which will benefit all three constituent peoples and the Others in BiH.” (PIC SB Communiqué – March 20, 2002)

· At a late-night session in Sarajevo, the Presidency of the SDA decides to fully and definitely withdraw from the talks on constitutional change in the Entities. “The SDA does not accept solutions that turn Bosniaks and Croats into national minorities in the RS, which legalizes ethnic cleansing, while Serbs in the Federation are granted a third of the power,” reads the SDA press release, adding that BiH could become “a Serb BiH.” The OHR strongly condemns the move by the SDA and criticizes Tihic for being “more interested in advancing his party’s narrow-minded interests than securing the rights of Bosniaks.” OHR spokespeople declare the move to be “a declaration of bankruptcy by the SDA.”

· The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, attends in Sarajevo the first meeting of the De-mining Board of Donors since the adoption of the De-mining Law by the BiH Parliament in February. The State-level de-mining legislation has, for the first time, put de-mining in BiH into a formal legal framework, creating the necessary government structure to administer, manage and control de-mining activities in BiH under the Ministry of Civil Affairs and Communications.

March 21

· Representatives of eight political parties – the SDA has withdrawn for good – gather again at the OHR to find a solution for the implementation of the Constitutional Court’s decision on the constituent status of BiH’s peoples in BiH’s two Entities. During the session, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, speaking live on Federation Television, says that progress continues to be made and that BiH’s political leaders now “have to find the courage to make the final compromise.” He explains that this does not mean a compromise on the Constitutional Court’s ruling, but on *how* to implement the ruling in the best way. “The International Community wants to see a home-grown solution,” Petritsch stresses. He strongly criticizes the SDA leadership for withdrawing from the talks, saying that this party is more interested in petty politics than the future of this country. Also commenting on the talks, the leader of the SDP, Zlatko Lagumdzija, notes that progress has been made. “We have agreed on some 80% of issues, however, the remaining 20% will require 80% of our energy in order to be resolved,” Lagumdzija says. Thursday’s session starts at 16.00 hours and lasts until 2.30 hours the next day.

· The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, welcomes the decision by the Council of Europe Committee of

Ministers to admit BiH as its 44th member. “BiH’s accession to the Council of Europe will cement the country’s European perspective, and this is where its future lies,” says OHR’s spokesperson Patrik Volf at a press conference in Sarajevo. He adds that membership of this European human rights organization will provide a “powerful stimulus” to BiH political leaders to “show real statesmanship and reach an agreement on constitutional change in the Entities.”

· At a press conference, the President of the World Football Federation (FIFA), Joseph Blatter, announces that all football clubs and associations in BiH have agreed to play together in the forthcoming football season for the first time since the outbreak of the war in 1992. “All this is leading in the same direction, the direction of peace and reconciliation,” Blatter says.

· The US Embassy offices in Sarajevo close for the public due to a credible security threat following the bombing of a church in Islamabad in which several US citizens died.

March 23

· At separate press conferences, representatives of the Party for BiH, the SDP and the NHI stress that their positions on the implementation of the Constitutional Court’s ruling on the constituent status of all peoples in BiH have not changed and that they will persist in seeking symmetric solutions for the two Entities. Parties from Republika Srpska also use the weekend to consolidate their position. RS President, Mirko Sarovic, his deputy, Dragan Cavic, and the SNSD president, Milorad Dodik, inform the press that they will not succumb to pressure from Bosniak and Croat parties from the Federation, and they stress that the RS will implement the Constitutional Court ruling in the best possible fashion, thereby protecting the rights of all constituent peoples, but also preserving the constitutional foundation of the RS.

March 24

· The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, invites to his residence in Sarajevo representatives of the SDP (Zlatko Lagumdzija), the PDP (Mladen Ivanic), the Party for BiH (Dzemil Sabrihafizovic) and the NHI (Kresimir Zubak) to continue the constitutional reform talks. The 8.5-hour meeting is also attended by the US Ambassador to BiH, Clifford Bond, and his Spanish colleague, Rafael Valle Garagorri, and solves a significant number of outstanding questions.

· As the talks on constitutional change in the Entities approach their crucial final phase, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, in a press release, urges political leaders in BiH to take “responsibility for the citizens they represent and restore dignity to the country by demonstrating that they can reach an agreement.” “These talks are the most significant negotiations on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina since Dayton,” the statement reads. “Time is running out.” (Press Release: High Representative presses BiH’s leaders for a domestic solution – March 24, 2002)

· Leaders of seven political parties from the RS issue a joint press release asking the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, to end the talks on constitutional change by March 25 in order to enable the Entity Parliaments to adopt constitutional amendments by the end of the month. The seven leaders reiterate that they are united in their view that there will be no bargaining with key issues relating to the position of the Serb people in BiH. The press release was signed by the presidents of the SDS, the PDP, the SNSD, the SPRS, the DSP (Democratic Socialist Party), the SNS (Serb Peoples Alliance), the DNS (Democratic Peoples Alliance) and the RS Party of Pensioners.

· “No-Man’s Land”, a film by BiH director Danis Tanovic about the futility of the war in BiH is named best foreign language film at the 74th Academy Awards ceremony – the Oscars. “This is for my country, for Bosnia,” Tanovic said as he holds aloft the golden Oscar statuette. The High Representative extends his congratulations to the young Sarajevo director. (Press Release: High Representative congratulates Danis Tanovic – March 25, 2002)

March 25

· The ninth round of constitutional reform talks resume at the OHR building in Sarajevo. OHR spokesman Patrik Volf says that the leaders of seven political parties are very close to a deal, as they have resolved a large number of disputed issues and only technical details remain open. The US and Spanish Ambassadors to BiH, Clifford Bond and Rafael Valle Garagorri, also attend the meeting.

· In separate interviews with Dnevni Avaz, the British and French ambassadors to BiH, Ian Cliff and Bernard Bajolet, commend the efforts of the High Representative to facilitate a home-grown solution on constitutional change, and stress that BiH leaders are responsible to successfully conclude the talks.

· Sarajevo newspapers carry an open letter addressed to the High Representative and signed by seven BiH independent intellectuals, in which they warn Wolfgang Petritsch that he will bear the prime responsibility for the continuation of BiH's agony if he carries on insisting on negotiations with "protagonists of ethnicism and nationalism", the result of which can only be "a rotten compromise."

· "The law does not yet rule in BiH. What prevails instead are nationally defined politics, inconsistency in the application of law, corrupt and incompetent courts, a fragmented judicial space, half-baked or half-implemented reforms and sheer negligence. Bosnia is, in short, a land where respect for and confidence in the law and its defenders is weak," the International Crisis Group (ICG) claims in its latest report on BiH, titled "The misrule of law in BiH." Click here for the full report.

· The governing boards of the Foundation for the Srebrenica/Potocari Memorial meet at the residence of the US Ambassador in Sarajevo to discuss the design and the layout of the land in Potocari selected for a memorial to thousands of victims of the massacre at Srebrenica. The meeting is also attended by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch.

· The US Embassy in Sarajevo opens to the public, five days after it registered a threat to the security of its staff. Embassy officials say the threat has passed, but that the security situation will continue to be monitored.

March 26

· At 17.00 hours, the representatives of eight political parties come together at the OHR to continue their discussions aimed at finding agreement for the implementation of the Constitutional Court's "Constituent Peoples Decision."

March 27

· After more than 90 hours of intense negotiations under the auspices of the High Representative, which began on March 8, the leaders of eight political parties in BiH finally agree on the elements for the implementation of the Constitutional Court's "Constituent Peoples Ruling." The Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement spells out a new institutional set-up in the RS and the Federation, turning the two Entities into multiethnic communities. The leaders of the SDP (Zlatko Lagumdzija), the NHI (Kresimir Zubak), and the Party for BiH (Safet Halilovic) sign the Agreement fully, while the representatives of the RS parties – the SDS (Dragan Kalinic), the SNSD (Milorad Dodik), the PDP (Mladen Ivanic) and the SPRS (Petar Djokic) – sign the document with two reservations regarding the structure of the transitional government and the trigger mechanisms for the protection of vital national interests. The HDZ refuses to sign the Agreement, while the SDA withdrew from the talks at an earlier stage. Click here for the text of the Agreement and details.

· The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, congratulates the BiH leaders on concluding the Agreement, which will "turn BiH into a truly multiethnic country, providing Bosniaks and Croats in the RS, and Serbs in the Federation with full representation and full protection of their rights." "This is a truly historic moment in the short history of modern BiH. This Agreement is the product of far-sightedness and courage among the political leaders of this country. The people of BiH can be proud of their leaders today," says Petritsch in a press release. He stresses that party representatives have developed and agreed on the mechanisms that will protect the vital interests of

the constituent peoples in both Entities and ensure their full representation in the decision-making bodies. The Agreement and the way in which it has been reached, says Petritsch, changes the political landscape of BiH. (Press Release: High Representative congratulates Party Leaders – March 27, 2002)

· The PIC Steering Board at the ambassadorial level welcomes the Agreement reached by BiH political parties, calling it a decisive step forward in BiH's democratic development and commitment to the rule of law. Commending the "exhaustive efforts" made by the High Representative in this regard, the ambassadors urge the Entity Parliaments speedily to adopt the agreed constitutional amendments and the political leaders to implement them fully. (PIC SB Communiqué – March 27, 2002) Western embassies and other international organizations, the Croatian and Yugoslav governments, numerous civic organizations in BiH, as well as the leaders of the Alliance also hail the conclusion of the Agreement.

· The Dutch peace group Inter-Church Peace Council (IKV) releases a new report addressing the responsibility of Dutch peacekeepers within UNPROFOR for the massacre of thousands of Bosniak civilians in Srebrenica in 1995. The report claims that the Dutch soldiers and politicians bore primary responsibility for failing to protect "up to 8,000 Bosniak men and boys murdered after Serb forces overran the UN 'Safe area' of Srebrenica."

· The Serbian government adopts a new decree on cooperation with the ICTY that paves the way for the extradition of war-crimes suspects. The decision comes ahead of a March 31 deadline set by the US Congress for Belgrade to meet conditions for receiving 40 million USD in aid. One of the necessary conditions was the extradition of indicted war criminals to The Hague Tribunal.

March 28

· RS leaders, including the Entity Prime Minister, Mladen Ivanic, the President, Mirko Sarovic, and the National Assembly speaker, Dragan Kalinic, say they signed the Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement with two serious reservations, but that it provides "a good basis for amendments to the RS Constitution." However, OHR spokesman Oleg Milisic stresses that in these amendments nothing short of the Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement is acceptable.

· After ten minutes, the RS National Assembly adjourns the extraordinary session scheduled for today, during which the deputies were to discuss the Sarajevo-Mrakovica Agreement, stating that the RS Constitutional Commission has to review the document first and come up with its own version of amendments to the RS Constitution.

· The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, issues three Decisions amending the State and Entity legislation governing the eligibility of candidates to run for elected office in BiH, and the permissibility of parties to register in court and certify for participation in elections. The package includes a Decision amending the BiH Election Law by defining ineligibility of officials dismissed by the HR, the Provisional Election Commission (PEC) and the Election Appeals Sub-Commission (EASC) – for personal violations -, COMSFOR and the IPTF Commissioner, and barring those parties in which persons dismissed by the High Representative or the PEC or EASC for personal violations hold central party positions from certifying for participation in elections / a Decision Amending the RS Law on Political Organizations, barring parties whose statutory party officials have not been properly elected under the party statute as well as parties whose statutory officials have been dismissed by the HR from registering in court / and, to the same effect in the Federation, a Decision inserting an annex to the Federation Law on Procedure of Entry of Legal Entities into the Court Register. (Press Release: High Representative issue decisions – March 28, 2002)

March 29

· During a meeting in Belgrade with the leadership of the Republika Srpska (RS president, Mirko Sarovic, RS Prime Minister, Mladen Ivanic, the Speaker of the RS National Assembly, Dragan Cavic), the FRY President, Vojislav Kostunica, terms positive the Mrakovica-Sarajevo agreement reached on March 27, adding that the RS political parties reserve the right to make minor corrections of this deal. Kostunica tells BETA news agency that the Agreement represents a "good basis for the amendments to the RS Constitution."

March 30

· Commenting on the Mrakovica-Sarajevo Agreement at separate press conference, the SDA and the HDZ (Bosniak and Croat nationalist parties which did not sign the document) accuse the Alliance parties and the OHR of agreeing to preserve an ethnically clean RS and turn Bosniaks and Croats into national minorities in this Entity. However, in a statement for Dnevni Avaz, OHR Senior Spokesperson Alexandra Stiglmayer strongly rejects all the allegations, criticizing the HDZ and SDA for misinforming the public for purposes of advancing their own party interests.

March 31

· The authorities in Belgrade fail to extradite any war crimes suspects to the Hague-based Tribunal, missing a midnight deadline set by the US to improve their country's cooperation with the ICTY.

Economic Statistics

BiH Economic Update

BiH Economic Data January 2001 – January 2002

Source: FBiH and RS Statistical Offices

Indicator	Federation of BiH	Republika Srpska	BIH (OHR estimate)
GDP nominal 2000 GDP nominal 1999 Nominal increase 1999-2000 Real increase 1999-2000 (minus inflation)	6,698 billion KM 6,141 billion KM + 9,0% +7,8%	2,463 billion KM 2,180 billion KM + 13,0% -0,6%	9,161 billion KM 8,321 billion KM +10,0% +5,5%
Index of Industrial Production 2001 compared to 2000 12/01 compared to 12/00	 +12,2% +7,4%	 -12,9 % -25,4%	 +3,8% -3,53%
Retail Price Index 2001 compared to 2000 12/01 compared to 12/00	 +1,7% + 0,3%	 +6,5% +2,2%	 N/A N/A
Average Net Salary 12/01 2001 compared to 2000 (averages)	457,68 KM +7,3%	332 KM +12,7%	412,5 KM +9,24%
Number of Employed 12/01 Number of Registered Unemployed 12/01 (RS 09/01)	405.689 persons 269.004 persons	227.740 persons 153.231persons	633.429 422.235
Number of pensioners in 10/01 (RS 09/01) Average pension in 10/01	279.359 persons 170 KM	179.835 persons 105 KM	459.194 persons 145 KM
Imports 2001 Exports 2001 Trade deficit 2001 Import/Export coverage	5,113 billion KM 1,746 billion KM 3,367 billion KM 34,1%	1,697 billion KM 0,599 billion KM 1,098 billion KM 35,3%	6,810 billion KM 2,345 billion KM 4,465 billion KM 34,4%

Return Statistics

See link to the UNHCR Mission to BiH web page at www.unhcr.ba or click here to see the latest statistics for February.

Please also consult the OHR's chronology for:

2002 2001 2000 1999 1998 1997 1996 and 1995

Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec