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BiH State-related Issues

Large-scale operation in BiH to remove terrorist threat

BiH authorities have launched a large-scale operation to remove the terrorist threat in the country, with over 700 BiH citizens of Arab origin under scrutiny and expected closure of suspicious Islamic charities, a senior BiH official told AFP. "We are very determined to end this story ... we will check all the suspects one by one and all those who are in any way linked to terrorists are to be expelled," a senior BiH government official told AFP speaking on condition of anonymity. According to him, a "small team of trustworthy" people was currently inspecting 741 persons of Arab origin, most of whom are believed to have previously obtained the country's citizenship "based on

faulty personal documentation." "It is very likely that most of them will be expelled from BiH," he added.

Constitutional reform

Political parties, High Representative resume talks on constitutional changes

Representatives of eight political parties in BiH continued the negotiations on the constitutional changes on Tuesday morning in Sarajevo in the presence of High Representative to BiH Wolfgang Petritsch, Spokesperson for the Office of the High Representative (OHR) Kevin Sullivan confirmed, reports ONASA. The High Representative said on Monday that the talks are difficult, but that some progress has been made. Petritsch said that most elements that would secure the rights and representation of BiH's peoples and citizens in both BiH entities have been identified and that many have been agreed. According to Sullivan, under discussion now are the details of these elements and the ways to reconcile and bridge the remaining disagreements.

Sullivan said that the representatives of the eight main parties in BiH worked until close to midnight yesterday and got together again at 9.30 o'clock this morning. "This demonstrates that they are committed to finding a solution. Whether they will succeed depends on whether they can really put aside party politics and take the wellbeing of the people of BiH to heart. They have a choice – to look like statesmen or mere party politicians with narrow interests." Sullivan stressed that, over the last weeks, BiH politicians participating in the talks, have shown a great degree of maturity and determination. "Naturally, it is difficult to go the last step and to have to take a decision that might not be entirely popular. This is the bread and butter of a democracy," Sullivan said.

First day of talks on constitutional changes fails to produce concrete results

Media reported last night that the first day of the final round of discussion among leaders of eight ruling parties in BiH and the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, on constitutional changes in the entities failed to produce any concrete results. In a statement for the press issued during a recess of the meeting which lasted until late last night, Petritsch said that negotiations are very difficult, but have entered a very substantive phase. He said that the atmosphere at the meeting was very constructive, and added that participants are aware that they will be judged on the results they produce. "Sometimes you can still see party politics and spirits of the past flaring up, but I think that this is a group of politicians that is forward-looking," said Petritsch. He explained that party representatives have "zeroed in on the vital interest and vital interest protection mechanism," but added that this is not about the mathematical symmetry. "It is about symmetry in substance, that we achieve the same quality of protection of rights of the peoples in both entities. To quote Zlatko Lagumdžija's statement in the negotiations, what we are looking for is consistency in the solution. This is the key word," Petritsch stressed. (All media in RS and Federation quoted Petritsch's statement)

Dnevni Avaz reported, quoting anonymous sources, that certain steps forward have been made last night. The daily's source said that most contentious issue during Monday's discussion was the definition of the vital national interests. "Representatives of RS parties have assumed such a position to preclude any compromise," explained the same source. "What is disputable is what can be defined as the vital national interest by certain caucus, because they want to reduce this issue in the RS to a minimum." Avaz also notes that the participants have not managed to agree on the ways of voting on issues of vital national interests, that is, if this will be done by one third or two thirds of deputies of one caucus. The daily writes that the plenary talks was interrupted on several occasions last night in order to allow for a bilateral or inter-party discussion on contentious issues.

The talks will resume early today in OHR building in Sarajevo.

SNSD's Milorad Dodik withdraws from the talks on constitutional changes

SNSD President Milorad Dodik is withdrawing from the talks on constitutional changes in BiH entities. The party spokesman, Rajko Vasic, told the press today that Dodik left the discussion "with all due respect to the High Representative who is trying very hard to facilitate agreement."

Vasic said that the SNSD had the best intention to reach compromise on this important matter of changing the entire constitutional organization of the RS based on the model of democratic countries. However, he stressed, nationalist parties from the Federation plan to harm all those who are not nationalists and their aim is only to make a show for the people before the elections to prove that they are the real or the new nationalists.

"The positions of HDZ, NHI, SBH, SDP and SDA are identical and absolutely not willing to compromise. Even when progress is reached one day, the next day it is no longer on the table - this is an old pre-war tactic", he said. The SNSD therefore decided to leave this to the Parliament (RSNA) and does not want to "waste any more time in these talks."

Vasic also said that the SNSD was not far from accepting the House of Peoples in RS, which would give the RS more legitimacy and credit. However, he added, the proposed idea of a Council is a milder version of the House of Peoples, since RS is not a state nor is it organized like the Federation. "The solutions do not have to be identical in RS and Federation because the two entities do not even have the same structure," he explained.

Vasic ruled out the possibility that the High Representative will impose the solution. Asked about the role of OHR in the talks, Vasic said that, according to information available to him, the OHR is not behaving as the third party, but as a moderator and organizer of these meetings. He said that if nothing is agreed, then the RS will suffer the damage as the entity which did not change its Constitution. He said that the damage to the RS is inevitable, the question is only how big a damage.

Four NGOs appeal to Petritsch: Equality of peoples can be secured only by two chamber parliaments

Four prominent NGOs gathering intellectuals from all national groups in BiH, *Serb Civic Council*, *Croat National Council*, *Congress of Bosniak Intellectual* and the *Association of Independent Intellectuals "Circle 99"*, sent a letter to the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, stressing that the full equality of citizens in BiH can only be secured through Houses of Peoples in the entity parliaments. The four NGOs believe that the issue of the vital national interests should deal with questions of protection and development of national identity, culture and cultural heritage, development and use of language and freedom of religion.

POLL: Federation citizens believe constitutional solutions must be symmetric in both entities

According to a poll conducted by Avaz agency, 87% of people living in the Federation believe that constitutional changes in the Federation and the RS must be symmetric. Only 2% of the polled citizens did not think so, while 11% had no opinion on the matter. The telephone poll was conducted among 500 persons in Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla and Capljina using a method of random sampling.

Person of the Day: Wolfgang Petritsch - Historic decision

Dnevni Avaz notes that the High Representative's position in the process of constitutional reform in BiH is highly delicate: Either political leaders in BiH will agree on constitutional changes on their own and with Petritsch's help, or he will have to impose the solution. Whichever way it happens, writes the daily, Petritsch - who is at the center of attention these days - will enter the BiH history.

Croat party representatives meet with Cardinal Puljic, reach a consensus on Croat national interests

Slobodna Dalmacija reports that the Vrhbosna Archbishop Cardinal Vinko Puljic and Monsignor Pero Sudar met with political representatives of BiH Croats in Sarajevo on Monday. The daily notes that the meeting which was organized by the prelates was attended by Miljenko Brkic, Ilija Simic, Ante Jelavic, Niko Lozancic and Kresimir Zubak. The politicians informed the Bishops that it was necessary to come up with a joint stance with regards to vital national interests of the Croats in BiH. It was agreed that the Croat representatives involved in constitutional changes talks will not give up on introduction of two-chamber Parliaments in both BiH entities. On the same issue, *Vecernji List* reads that the most important Croat political and church institutions have reached a complete consensus that the offered proposals of constitutional changes do not bring anything to Croats in the RS and that smaller in number Croats lose mechanisms of protection in the Federation guaranteed by the Washington and Dayton agreements.

Croats in BiH have full support from Zagreb

The Deputy Prime Minister of the Croatian Government, Drazen Budisa, said that Croats in BiH have full support of Zagreb in their rejection of a "semi -solution which is the so called Commission for national equality, and which the international community seeks to establish in the RS." In an OTV program last night, Budisa said: "Such solutions united Croats in BiH. In their rejection of such solutions, they have the full support of the Croatian Government, especially in their efforts to establish a common legal order, with equal rights for all three nations."

Budisa emphasized that the task of the Croatian Government, as well as its national, constitutional and Dayton obligation was to, by using all political means, seek such organization of BiH in which Croats would not become a national minority. Budisa emphasized that this is a strategic issue of Croatian politics due to the fact that "otherwise, BiH would turn into a state with two nations and would further keep BiH scene as an area of instability in Southeastern Europe." "Our national task at this moment is to raise our voice and say clearly that we, as a state, are not satisfied with the position of Croats in BiH," Budisa said.

Dnevni List: Only Croats want consistent implementation of CC Decision

Dnevni List carries a lengthy article about the talks on constitutional changes mostly reiterating stories from Monday about the High Representative meeting with Alija Izetbegovic and HDZ BiH delegation. DL also quotes OHR spokespersons Alexandra Stiglmeier as saying that an agreement has to be reached in the next few days and that this round of talks was the final one. Stiglmeier stressed that the OHR deemed that, despite differences, an agreement could still be reached. She also commented on Mladen Ivanic's statement that the RS Government would send into parliamentary procedure amendments to the RS Constitution if an agreement were not reached, saying that those statements would not help. "It would be wiser to concentrate on talks rather than threats," she said.

The daily also quotes Mariofil Ljubic of the HDZ BiH as saying that his and Barisa Colak's stances with regards to the constitutional reforms (also from HDZ BiH) are similar to ones by the President of the NHI, Kresimir Zubak, with a few minor differences. Ljubic also said that Serbs took a firm stand towards Croat motions to introduce a House of Peoples in the RS adding that the SDP representatives did not comment on the proposals much and that one can sense insecurity in the SDA positions. Mariofil Ljubic says that one gets a feeling that it is only the Croats, both the HDZ and Zubak of the NHI who want a consistent implementation of the CoCo's Decision

RS Prime Minister: Croat parties are the greatest obstacle to

reaching solutions

SRNA news agency quotes the RS Prime Minister, Mladen Ivanic, as saying that he strongly opposes the intentions of BiH Federation political parties which insist on the introduction of the House of Peoples in the RS National Assembly. "I do not have the intention to implement the possible imposed solutions, nor do I agree on any attempts of elimination of the RS", said Ivanic. According to him, the main cause of a standstill in the negotiations on constitutional changes are frustrations of the Croat political parties from BiH. "These parties are not satisfied with a situation in which Croats do not have a part of BiH territory where they could dominate", said Ivanic.

"Their decision was to set up the BiH Federation based on their free will and for that move they had been rewarded with significant financial assistance at the time and especially during the war", said Ivanic and added that "it is not possible to change so important strategic decisions every now and then".

Federation

Evictions in Drvar continue, Croatian authorities warn about a new wave of refugees from BiH

The evictions of illegal Croat tenants in Drvar has quickly become a top story in the Federation media. Federation Television carried a lengthy report on the situation in Drvar and the alleged "exodus of Croats" from BiH, while all other media reported on the reaction of Croatian government and party officials to this problem.

FTV noted that the eviction process in Drvar have been taking place at a steady pace, with some five evictions per week. However, the rate of evictions recently intensified to five per day, which resulted in a greater outflow of Croats from this town. Over the weekend, some 15 Croat families have crossed the border with Croatia and settled in abandoned military facility in Knin area, while Croatian government and Croat parties from BiH voiced their concern that thousands of other Croats may follow suit. The UNHCR office in Drvar said, however, that these estimates have been widely exaggerated, and that the number of Croats in the town who are occupying homes to which request for return has been filed is about 850.

Drvar Mayor, Dragan Puzigaca, said that a great deal of media hype has been created about this case and stressed that all those who had to leave Drvar in the past weeks were in effect illegal tenants with property elsewhere. "I believe that the application of property laws has been consistent, that this is not a case of any form of ethnic cleansing, because if laws are applied, this cannot be views as ethnic cleansing," Puzigaca said.

The Alliance of Bosnian Croats on Monday asked the Croatian government and BiH authorities to help resolve the problems of BiH Croats whose refugee agony continued with

recent evictions from Drvar. "The international community, Croatia and BiH have done nothing to make it possible for these people to return to their homes in central BiH and areas of the now RS, as well as into north-western BiH in Bosanska Posavina," the Alliance said in a statement, reports HINA news agency. (Croatian newspapers – Slobodna Dalmacija, Vjesnik, Jutarnji List, and Vecernji List also dedicated a great deal of space to Drvar evictions – see Cro Press Summary for details)

Croatia voices concern over eviction of BiH Croats

Croatia voiced its concern to Sarajevo on Monday over the recent eviction of BiH Croats in Drvar who have started arriving in Croatia, the foreign ministry said in a statement. In a letter to the Council of Ministers, Croatian ambassador to BiH, Josip Vrbosic "voiced concern over the recent events in Drvar and appealed for adequate measures to be taken urgently aimed at finding a solution to stop the emigration of Croats from BiH." The ministry

added that Vrbosic also wrote to the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, and the head of the OSCE mission to BiH, Robert Beecroft, appealing to them for help, report media in the Federation.

Josic Vrbosic was also a guest of the late night news at the Federation TV, where he reiterated the position of his country on this issue. He said Croatia is concerned about the recent events in the municipality of Drvar and will requests appropriate steps be taken in order to work out solutions that are to prevent the emigration of Croats from BiH. Vrbosic said that houses should be built for those people wherever they choose to live in BiH. He said he will visit Drvar on Tuesday and discuss concrete solutions with authorities there.

OHR: Drvar refugees have fallen hostage to their political leaders

Commenting on the evictions of Croat families in Drvar and their subsequent move to Croatia, OHR spokesman Oleg Milisic said that the OHR regrets the refugees' decision to leave the territory of BiH and resettle in the neighboring country. In a statement for Sarajevo Jutarnje Novine, Milisic said their decision does not contribute to the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement and, in particular, its Annex 7. "Individuals have right to chose where they are going to live. It is necessary to secure an alternative accommodation to all those who do not have conditions to do so on their own. This means that only those who are not dual occupants or whose houses have not been repaired, have right on alternative accommodation," Milisic explained. The daily also quotes UNHRC official who stresses that the 14 families in question did not have right to alternative accommodation, because their houses elsewhere in BiH have been repaired.

Milisic blamed local authorities in Drvar for giving false hopes to Croat refugees, promising them other people's property. "In certain sense, they have become hostages of political leaders," Milisic said. This was the top story in Jutarnje Novine.

Merkur shareholders ask for help by OHR Anti-corruption Department

Oslobodjenje reports that small shareholders in Mostar Merkur companies (two companies with the same name) have asked the OHR Anti-corruption department to conduct an investigation into the sale of buildings worth over million KM and the annulment of the privatization of this company. The daily notes that common interests have brought together Mostarians from two sides of the Neretva river.

Merkur was a small company which was operational for decades before the war, when one of its branches was opened on "the other side of the river" and continued working as a parallel company under the same name. The original company's property was divided in a non-transparent fashion between the two, while, in words of one of the shareholders, HDZ officials appropriated the rest. The shareholders would like to resolve the property issues, privatization and become shareholders of a joint Merkur company.

Cantonal Prosecution in Mostar submits criminal report against HDZ Secretary General Josip Merdzo

Dnevni List reports that the Cantonal prosecution in Mostar has filed a criminal report against the HDZ BiH Secretary General Josip Merdzo on charges of embezzlement of 800.000 KMs of the HNC budget at the time Merdzo was the Prime Minister of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton Government. The paper's source says that the report has been filed by the Financial Police. Josip Merdzo commented on the information saying that he had been informed about it through his channels, adding that he did not want to comment further on this. He only added that no money was missing from the HNC budget.

Dnevni List puts this into context of Merdzo's candidacy for the position of the Mostar Mayor/Deputy Mayor, when his name was often mentioned as the person likely to succeed Neven Tomic, saying that the charges come in the eve of the candidacy. HDZ officials comment on the charges saying that the current authority in Sarajevo and the IC i.e. the High Representative want to "remove" Merdzo before he stepped into the office which is still a subject of calculations. Dnevni List failed to get comments from the Cantonal Prosecution and Cantonal Court in Mostar.

Republika Srpska

Public debate on Draft RTRS law

The RS Association of journalists organized public debate on the draft RTRS law. Glas srpski (GS) reports that representatives of the RS Government, NGOs, syndicates, media and other organizations participated in the debate. GS quotes the Chairman of the RS Association of journalists, Brane Bozic as saying: "The draft law on the RTRS represents good initial material that should enable the establishment of this TV as a public television service to RS citizens." Bozic called upon all attendees to give their suggestions on two key provisions of this law – the establishment of the RTRS and selection of the Board of Governors members, since the OHR sees solutions offered in the draft as non democratic.

Serb Radical Party: Radicals unjustly excluded from political life

Glas srpski reports on yesterday's press conference of the Serb Radical Party (SRS). The SRS Secretary General, Ognjen Tadic stated that the RS authorities were ready to confront the High Representative only when it is in their direct interest. According to Tadic, the SRS is unjustly and fully excluded from the institutions of the system and thus prevented to influence the future of the RS. The SRS does not agree with the nomination of Dragan Mikerevic for the Chairman of the Council of Ministers.

RS Defense Minister on reduction of RS Army

The RS Defense Minister, Slobodan Bilic stated to Nezavisne novine that the RS Army should reduce the numbers of its members for 2,360 soldiers, in the process of restructuring of the armed forces in BiH and that so far, there are no adequate solutions to be offered to those soldiers who would lose their jobs. Bilic said that, even though the deadline for reduction was the year 2005, the international community insisted to carry out these reductions by mid 2003.

Editorials

(provided by OHR Mostar)

Slobodna Dalmacija: Petritsch has a napkin too ...

By Petar Milos

In his editorial Petar Milos asks rhetorically as to why High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch announced HDZ as the guilty party in talks on the constitutional reforms. After he had explained what Petritsch has said in "Slobodna Bosna" weekly about weak HDZ, Milos says that Petritsch's fear of HDZ blocking the negotiations is unfounded, because all Croat parties have agreed on meeting in Stup (Sarajevo) to ask for House of Peoples in both entities. Milos added that Petritsch and some other international circles have divided BiH and now they try to put the blame on the others. Milos finishes his editorial in this way: "*A priori* condemning the strongest Croat party for eventual failure of negotiations on constitutional reforms is not a good sign for Croats. Moreover, Petritsch's seat soon will be taken by lord Paddy Ashdown, a man on who's witnessing about Tudjman's napkin Tiho Blaskic has been sentenced. These days he is parading again with the same napkin on Milosevic's trial (it is more a trial to Tudjman and Croats) and sticks that napkin on forehead or back of each Croat."

Headlines

Vecernji List

- Because of Croats leaving Drvar: Croatia protests to BiH
- Constitutional changes: Church and Croat representatives unanimous: Petritsch offers nothing to Croats
- Hans Koschnik: Mostar still not a normal city

Jutarnje Novine

- Oleg Milisic: Refugees are hostages of political leaders

Dnevni Avaz

- Political drama unfolding: CoCo talks

Oslobodjenje

- Leaders of Croat parties meet with Cardinal Puljic
- Merkur shareholders ask for help of OHR Anti-corruption Dept.

Glas srpski

- Evidence against Momcilo Perisic presented at a meeting of Yugoslav and Serbian leadership: Espionage on video tape
- Kostunica and Djindjic in unison: Perisic, submit a resignation!

Nezavisne novine

- BiH politicians meeting with the High Representative: Final decision on changes of the Constitution today?
- Local Courts received ICTY approval to process war crimes cases: 17 processes in Mostar and Trebinje
- Trade in SDS way: Klickovic sold "Hepok" building