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BiH State-related Issues

Bosnia, Greece sign military cooperation pact

Greece and Bosnia-Herzegovina signed on Monday in Athens a military cooperation pact and agreed to work together to “normalise” the situation in the troubled Balkans, the Greek defence ministry said, and reports the AFP. “We agreed to work together for a normalisation of the situation in the

Balkans and to accelerate the process of integrating countries of southeastern Europe, such as BiH, in international and regional

organisations,” said Greek Secretary of State for Defence Lucas Apostolidis. The protocol will initially enable BiH officers to be trained in Greek military academies already this year.

Constitutional Reform

Zdravko Tomac: Constitutional changes offer the last chance to abolish the RS

The deputy speaker of the Croatian Parliament, Zdravko Tomac, said that the ongoing constitutional changes in BiH will offer the last chance to abolish RS. Tomac told BiH Radio 1 that the purpose of Saturday's meeting with Croat parties in Zagreb was to express support "for those forces in BiH that desire through constitutional amendment to nullify the results of Slobodan Milosevic's policy of genocide." (SRNA report)

Croatian Foreign Ministry: BiH - one of the main foreign policy priorities

The Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Monday that the relations with neighboring BiH were one of the main priorities of the Croatian foreign policy, Hina news agency reported. "The Croatian government has been and will be doing everything in its power to contribute to as efficient as possible functioning of the existing institutions in BiH, and all its moves will be aimed at reaching that goal. Due to the significance of the current moment in BiH and in the light of constitutional changes, the Croatian government has been trying to take its actions in a transparent manner and in agreement with the other side," said a press release issued by the Ministry. To that end, the Ministry said, it has had a number of formal and informal contacts, above all with the central political institutions in BiH, Croat representatives in those bodies, as well as other relevant factors on the BiH political scene.

High Representative meets Croatia's Foreign Minister in Brussels

HINA news agency reports that the Croatia's Foreign Minister, Tonino Picula, met on Monday in Brussels with the High Representative for BiH, Wolfgang Petritsch, and discussed the ongoing constitutional changes in BiH. According to an official communiqué issued by the Croatian Mission to the EU, the two officials emphasized the need to find solutions that would be acceptable for all peoples, and in the spirit of compromise and democracy. "Open dialogue with full respect for the equality of all three constituent nations in BiH remains the only mode of solving the existing problems," said the statement. According to the statement, Picula also informed the High Representative about his recent meeting with representatives of Croat parties in BiH, and added that Croatia did not want to remain passive in the ongoing debate about constitutional changes. He stressed at the end that Croatia's authorities are ready to discuss the same issue with representatives of all other parties in BiH.

In the interview with Dnevni Avaz, however, the High Representative said that he informed Picula that the process of constitutional changes must be agreed upon within BiH. "This must be a BiH solution, and the main actors are the three constituent peoples in BiH," Petritsch told Picula.

SDP: We have not come to Zagreb because of manipulations with the meeting (provided by OHR Mostar)

Ivo Komsic of the SDP: "SDP is not against inter-party talks, especially of our parties in BiH, that are interested in constitutional changes and that feel responsible for them. The Croatian Government, as a signatory of the Dayton Peace Agreement, also has an obligation to participate actively in its implementation. SDP refused to participate because of the manipulation of the Croatian with this meeting. For instance, early in the morning, the Croatian Radio informed that the meeting was organized at the initiative of Ante Jelavic, and at his request Prime Minister Racan invited representatives of BiH political parties. Neither me in person, nor SDP can attend such meetings

because it is against our conception, according to which all internal BiH problems have to be resolved in our own country. Another reason is the initiative of the Foreign Policy Board of the Croatian Parliament according to which the Croatian Government together with the Council of Minister should draft a new proposal of the constitutional changes. The invitation of Zdravko Tomac, the President of the aforementioned Board, to the Turkish Government, fit into it. During his visit to Turkey, he invited Turkey to participate in the drafting of the constitutional changes in BiH. Due to these circumstances, SDP did not participate at the Zagreb meeting because we believe that such gathering renews old political patterns that some political headquarters from BiH are searching for Croatian strongholds in Zagreb, Serb in Belgrade and the Bosniak one in Turkey.”

Nezavinse Novine: (Dis)agreement over amendments to entities' constitutions - 26th February deadline

Leaders of the most influential parties in BiH should harmonize the views on the constitutional amendments with the BiH Constitutional Court ruling on constituent status of all three peoples in BiH before February 26th when a new meeting with the High Representative is scheduled. Petritsch ordered them to harmonize different options as soon as possible. It (the amendments) is about the way in which the power in BiH will be distributed. Public knows about different views that exist between the two main blocks and each of these two blocks is somehow connected to its entity. However, it turns out that even amongst the political parties from the BiH Federation there is a wide range of different opinions on the implementation of the BiH Constitutional Court ruling and the way in which the power in BiH will be distributed in the future.

A spokesman for the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), Elmir Jahic says that this party could accept introduction of council for protection of peoples in both entities, which is a proposal put forth by RS political parties who, in this way, are trying to avoid the introduction of the House of Peoples in the RS National Assembly. According to Jahic, the Council for protection of peoples would meet when a vital national interest of any of BiH constituent peoples has to be protected. He also said that the BiH Parliament's House of Peoples would be responsible for decisions that pertain to protection of vital national interest. This option is acceptable for the SDA only if the House of Peoples in the BiH Parliament is abolished, given that the SDA advocates symmetrical solutions for both entities. “This option is acceptable for us because we advocate the strengthening of BiH common institutions. But, when it comes to the issue of power distribution we do not give up on the request that power should be distributed in accordance with the 1991 Census”, said Jahic.

Representatives of the SDP BiH are of the opinion that governments of both entities should be formed in accordance with the 1991 Census, but that none of the constituent peoples in BiH should be represented with more than 40% and less than 20 %. President of the SDP BiH Council for political and legal matters, Sabrija Pojskic explains that with this proposal the SDP BiH wants to avoid domination of one nation over the other two. On the other hand, the SDP BiH insists on introduction of house of peoples in the RS National Assembly. Representatives of the SBiH support both the introduction of the House of Peoples in the RS National Assembly and the idea that power in BiH should be distributed in accordance with the 1991 Census. Safet Halilovic, the SBiH Presidency Chairman, explains why he thinks, unlike the SDA, that introduction of the Council for protection of peoples is not the best solution. “It is very difficult to restrict and reduce vital national interests to several issues. Secondly, the capacity that the Council has is a very important issue. The BiH Federation House of Peoples discusses all issues that the House of Representatives discusses, while the Council for protection of peoples would not do it but only protect vital national interests. Even if we accepted that role of the entity House of Peoples be reduced, this would boil down to the protection of vital national interest then the question is would the Croat parties accept it? Would they accept the reduced role of the House of Peoples in the BiH Federation Parliament? Also symmetrical solutions in both entities have to be ensured. That is the circle you cannot break”, said Halilovic.

Next meeting of the BiH leaders should take place on February 21st.

Federation

Ante Jelavic to stay leader of the HDZ until May

In a statement for Dnevni Avaz, the dismissed HDZ president, Ante Jelavic, said that if his presence in the party is seen as the obstacle for the re-registration of the party before the October elections, he will step down from this post by the beginning of May. After the president of the Cantonal court in Mostar, Castimir Mandaric, implied on Monday that the HDZ may not be able to re-register because its president is an official dismissed by the High Representative, Jelavic said that he would no longer be that obstacle. "Not only me, but the whole team of people who were banned by the High Representative to actively participate (in the party)," said Jelavic, adding that the HDZ will in future be organized similarly to the Party for BiH. In other words, it will have a Presidency, which will be the highest decision-making body within the party. "This will hopefully remove the obstacles for the re-registration of the party," said Jelavic.

Cantonal court in Zenica lunches an investigation of four Bosniak officers

The Cantonal Court in Zenica launched on Monday a pretrial investigation into four Bosniak officers, former members of the BiH army, suspected of committing war crimes in Zenica areas during the 1992-1995 war. Federation Television reported that the four – Vehid Karamujo, Jasmin Isic, Seido Osmanovic and Smajo Osmanovic – were members of the 7th Muslim brigade, which was largely made up of volunteers from Islamic countries. The same source said that the four were suspected of committing war crimes against Croat and Serb civilians and prisoners of war, held in an improvised war-time prison in Zenica.

Zenica Cantonal court resumes hearings in the Zepce group case

Federation Television reported that the Cantonal Court in Zenica also on Monday resumed a judicial hearings in the case of the so-called Zepce group – a group of 14 Croats suspected of committing war crimes against Bosniaks and Serbs in Zepce area between 1992-1994. During this stage of the pre-trial investigation, all defendant are to be heard, after which the judicial council will determine whether any of the suspects ought to be detained.

BPS gives up on Sefer Halilovic re-assuming the post of the Federation Minister of Refugees and DPs

Bosnian Patriotic Party (BPS) decided on Monday to give up on its insistence that its president, Sefer Halilovic, re-assumes the post of the Federation Minister of Refugees and DPs. The BPS agreed to put forth a name of a new candidate for the post in the coming days, which would finally put an end to the Halilovic affair. Halilovic, former commander of BiH army indicted for war crimes, was granted a temporary pre-trial release by the ICTY in December.

International Community

EU to take over police mission in BiH

EU Foreign Ministers agreed on Monday to the European Union taking direct charge of a nearly 500-strong police mission in BiH, marking its first foray into a peacekeeping operation, report nearly all news agencies (and carries Oslobođenje and Avaz). Sense agency notes that the current IPTF police mission in BiH will end by December 2002 and in January of the following year be replaced by the EU. By that time, the EU will have finalized all political, operational and technical preparations for taking-over the mission, which will be in place until the end of the 2005. According to SENSE news agency sources, the mission will cost around 38 million euros and will be financed from

the joint budget in Brussels.

"It's the first time we take a decision of this sort," putting into practice the common security and defense policy to which the 15 member-states committed themselves a decade ago, Spanish Foreign Minister, Josep Pique said. Pique, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, said the EU Police force would comprise 466 officers, plus 67 expatriate civilians and 289 local staff.

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, said that there is still quite a lot of work left in BiH. "It's of vital importance for Bosnia to get de-politicized with multi-ethnic police in place," Petritsch told reporters after briefing with the EU ministers in Brussels, notes AFP. Reuters also quotes the High Representative as saying that the mission takeover would give the EU the visibility it deserves, giving that it was already "picking up most of the tab." "What we need there is (for the EU) to be more visible for the people so they will feel more included in the process of European integration," Petritsch said. (Although it was one of the top stories in foreign news agencies covering the Balkans, the decision was given quite a low profile in local, both electronic and print - media. Federation TV and the BH Radio 1 reported about this only after announcing the news from the country. Federation Television, however, quoted extensively from the High Representative's speech before the EU General Affairs Council. Dnevni Avaz carried excerpts. See the attachment.)

Wolfgang Petritsch for Dnevni Avaz: Police mission fits into EU strategy of Europeisation of BiH

In a short interview with Dnevni Avaz, the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, commented on the decision that EU will take over the police mission in BiH. "Police mission will be a mission of the EU and that fully fits into my strategy of Europeanization of BiH and in my idea that BiH must move from Dayton towards Europe," said Petritsch. "In the times when the international help is declining, the EU is strengthening its engagement in BiH."

During his meeting in Brussels, Petritsch informed the EU Foreign Ministers about the progress made in the past three years in all fields in BiH, and labeled the decision about the police mission as historical. The High Representative also said that Javier Solana and Chris Patten supported his plan of streamlining of the International Community, and which was presented during yesterday's session. He also said that everyone in Brussels expects that the presidential elections are held in October, as scheduled.

Wolfgang Petritsch says shaming that Karadzic and Mladic have not been arrested

During a Brussels meeting with EU Foreign Ministers, the High Representative stressed that the fact that BiH's two most wanted Serb war crimes suspects are still at large is an embarrassment, and urged United States and its European allies to capture former Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic and his war-time army commander, Ratko Mladic. Referring to the increasing minority return, he said: "The architects of ethnic cleansing have not won. In fact, they are losing," said Petritsch, adding that "those who terrorized Sarajevo and other cities and towns need to be brought to justice." In a critical manner, reports AFP, Petritsch said that "people in Bosnia do not understand" why SFOR could track down al-Qaeda suspects in BiH just a few weeks after the September 11 attack in the US, yet not capture Karadzic and Mladic six years after the war in BiH ended.

FRY President: Ratko Mladic is not in Yugoslavia

The FRY president, Vojislav Kostunica, dismissed on Monday the allegations, put forth by the Chief ICTY Prosecutor, Carla Del Ponte, that one of the most wanted war crimes suspects, Ratko Mladic, is residing somewhere in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. "According to the information I was given by the army, Mladic is not on our soil," Kostunica told reporters. "The Yugoslav army is no longer protecting Mladic," he stressed, adding that Del Ponte's statements create only problems for the Tribunal. (original AFP report)

New High Representative Paddy Ashdown Arrives to BiH With Double Responsibility

Nezavisne Novine write that the New High Representative to BiH Paddy Ashdown, as proposed to EU Foreign Affairs Ministers, could have a double responsibility. In other words, he could be a new High Representative as well as Special EU Envoy to BiH at the same time. This was justified by the fact that Brussels looks at BiH as to a country destined to join European integration.

Editorials

(provided by OHR Mostar)

Vecernji List: State-that is not me!

By Radoslav Dodig

According to destructive news, that have been sent off by high-ranked state officials lately, BiH is a black state in which everybody cheats the state and hides something from it. Indeed, the question arises as to what is it in a Bosnian and Herzegovinian being, that makes them like to cheat their own state and work illegally. They all demand from the state to educate and give medical treatment for their children for free, to pay them pensions when they retire, and they do not wonder from where the state gets money to meet these obligations. The BiH view on the paying of taxes is completely contrary to the American one: it is a heroic and good deed to cheat the state and evade paying of taxes and contributions. The state is something foreign and alien, and for this reason it should not be respected. Only the smart, strong and organized ones have a strong state. The others are left with an illusion about the state.

Vecernji List: Serpent

By Zdenko Cosic

The position and future of BiH Croats had to reach an alarming point, from which you have a view on national minorities, to make political representatives of all parties with a Croat prefix to sit together and try to reach an agreement on something that for them individually has never been disputable at all. The situation must be very serious because they invited Zagreb to help them, since Zagreb is also supposed to take care of the position of its fellow-people in a neighboring country. It appears that all of us should feel relief since the agreement similar to the one from the nineties has been reached and we also have a support of the Government in Zagreb. And this is not all: Bosniak parties, as well as those without a national tinge, are willing to support attitudes of the Croat political parties.

Mladen Ivanic, the Prime Minister of the one-House Serb entity, took care that everything does not seem so ideal. As if he wanted to spare his political partners from the Federation the bother, by reminding them that the Parliament of the RS will pass constitutional changes by a two-thirds majority. This is a clear message that the introduction of the House of Peoples is not being seriously discussed in a Serb part of BiH.

It is not very probable that an agreement on the way of implementing of the BiH Constitutional Court decision on constituency of peoples will be reached, and it means that the International Community, that is, its representative Wolfgang Petritsch, will have a final word again.

Certainly, the joint stand within a Croat political body on the issue of constituency of peoples, as well as, a high degree of support and understanding of political partners in the Federation should be welcomed. Still, it should not be expected that this agreement will be some relevant argument in the case of international arbitration and imposing of the solutions that, most probably, will take place at the end. Judging by logic of the imposed solutions

that have been coming from Petritsch's Office so far, then the Croat negotiators have no right to sleep peacefully. Because, for God's sake, what the people will say if the serpent from the same hole bites you twice?!

Headlines

Oslobodjenje

- Federation Ministry of Defense defines criteria for lay offs
- Nora Petritsch visits a boy who lost his sight and one fist after stepping on a mine

Dnevni Avaz

- New investigation of old cases

Jutarnje novine

- Federation Ministry of Defense: when will the decision about lay off be made?

Vecernji List

- Sejfidin Tokic on Zdravko Tomac's initiative that Croatia and Turkey help in constitutional changes: Croatia continues Tudjman's policy towards BiH
- Ivica Vidovic, nephew of Vlatko Vidovic who was injured from planted mine near Travnik: Burnt haystack was bait for all us to die!
- Leutar case trial continues today: Protected witness seen on Mount Igman

Glas srpski

- Illegally Sold Gold
- Nikola Spiric Accused BiH Council of Ministers

Nezavisne novine

- US President Visiting Japan
- East and West Together Against Terrorism