

Signing of the Agreements on Special Relations and Ploce-Neum

Today, it is with extreme disappointment that I announce on behalf of the International Community that the signing of the Agreement on Special Relations between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia, as well as the Ploce-Neum Agreement, which was scheduled for today has, once again, been postponed.

Unfortunately, it appears that SDA and coalition inter-party rivalries concerning, among other issues, personal agendas, as well as petty squabbling are holding these agreements hostage. This prevents the citizens of all parties from benefiting from both agreements. Such behavior is irresponsible and is a disservice to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina who want to build bridges with their neighbors and with the Croatian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina whom those officials also claim to represent.

At the same time, the international community compliments the mature and respectable efforts of the Government of Croatia who has demonstrated itself to be a responsible interlocutor throughout this process. I know that it took a great deal of political courage on their part to negotiate these two agreements, especially the Ploce-Neum Agreement, and we now expect the Federation leadership to demonstrate the same level of commitment.

The Agreement on Special Relations is a general framework agreement which provides for detailed annexes to be mutually developed by the parties with the primary objective of establishing transparent institutionalized cooperation. It respects the special interests of all peoples of the Republic of Croatia and the Federation and is fully consistent with the Dayton Peace Accords. The signing of this Agreement allows the beginning of a structured dialogue between the parties and brings increased stability to their relations.

On the other hand, the lack of will to sign this agreement which was brokered by the Office of the High Representative and the United States Government could be construed to mean that the Federation does not support transparency, does not want to support regional stability and is sending a signal to Croat and Serb citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina alike that there are no protections offered to them. There has been a greater realization in some circles in Sarajevo that transparency also indicates full disclosure of relationships with their friends abroad. There is also an increased sense that some do not desire a multi-ethnic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the lack of an Agreement would make it difficult for the International Community to dissuade the minority Croatian population in Bosnia and Herzegovina from seeking other options.

Simultaneously, the Federation Government is endangering the signing of the Ploce-Neum Agreement which allows Bosnia and Herzegovina to breathe economically, provides it access to the sea and is vital to the future economic development so badly needed which is necessary to attract foreign investment.

Clearly, this situation calls into question the desire of Federation government officials to negotiate in good faith, their capability to engage in coherent international negotiations and their concern for their citizens. It gives the perception of a less than credible leadership which is not mature enough to respect democratic principles. The possible resolution of other issues such as Brcko, for example, need to be viewed based on the maturity of this government and the desire and ability to act in a responsible manner. It therefore raises the issue of the Federation as a serious interlocutor in other negotiations and outstanding issues.

Hopefully when history is written, it will not show that the International Community cared more about the people of this region and their futures than did their own leaders.

However, we remain optimistic and our expectation is that the internal squabbling will be resolved in the next several days, and that both agreements will be signed within a week.