

BiH Media Round-up, 28/5/2002

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Paddy Ashdown takes over the post of High Representative from Wolfgang Petritsch

The hand-over of duties of the High Representative in BiH on Monday was by far the top story in all media in BiH. The new High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, who earlier on yesterday took over from the Austrian diplomat, Wolfgang Petritsch, addressed both chambers of the BiH Parliament and informed the delegates and the public about main priorities during his mandate. Media quote Ashdown as saying that he will work hard, together with people of BiH, to "put this country irreversibly on the road to statehood and membership to Europe." During his speech, the new High Representative also reiterated that crime and corruption are a great threat to BiH and its citizens. For this reason, Ashdown stressed, he will work on the established of the rule of law and justice in the country.

Reactions by politicians

Zlatko Lagumdžija (SDP): What is find encouraging in the address by Lord Ashdown is several messages, such as the one that Dayton is a beginning, not the end towards a normal BiH. I am especially impressed by his statement that, when he will have to make decisions, he will not search for a geometrical middle among the three sides, which was practically introduced ten years ago. Instead, he will rule in the interest of BiH. Most important message is that we need to look towards to forces which give hope, rather than to those who evoke fear in people."

Kresimir Zubak (NHI): "When I compare what the NHI, as a party, wrote in its program for the last elections, I see that all points of our program – declaration for a better BiH – are included in the speech of the High Representative."

Rasim Kadic (LDS): "I think that today we are getting a new chance for a better future of BiH. I am satisfied with the Paddy Ashdown's address, for he clearly expressed desire to see BiH within European integration processes, [BiH] open for young people, business and reform, which will lead to new jobs."

Mirko Banjac (SDS): "I expect the new High Representative to respect the laws of this country, and to help us, with new ideas, to overcome this crisis. I do not expect any sort of imposed solutions, because I believe that we are, as he also says, a capable people who can agree on out own on solutions for this country."

Miro Grabovac Titan (Croat Democratic Union – HDU –not be confused with the HDZ): "My first impression about the new High Representative is positive, however, it is still too early for an evaluation. One needs to wait and see what [Ashdown] will do in the sphere of the rule of law, stabilization of BiH, fight against corruption, and, naturally, in the fight against crime and corruption and terrorism, opening of new jobs, as a foundation of sustainability of BiH and its people."

Pro-European Peoples' Party (led by Jandranko Prlic) said in a statement for the press that it supports the basic priorities enumerated in the address by the new High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, before the BiH Parliament. Pro-ENS emphasized that some of those items, such as justice, employment, higher educational standards and greater responsibility on the part of local politicians, are also a part of the party agenda. Pro-ENS also commended the concept of the International Community being only a mediator in the process of Europeanization in BiH.

Media coverage

Ashdown's speech before the BiH Parliament was covered extensively by all electronic and print media across BiH. While the hand-over and the address were the front page story in the Federation media (including Vecernji List and Dnevni List), some dailies in the RS lead with less significant items (e.g., "Wild Boars Eat all the Corn in Srbac" was the front page story in Glas Srpski) and use shorter agency reports to cover the hand-over. Ashdown's visit to Banja Luka was, however, the top story in Nezavisne Novine and prime time and late night news on the RTRS. Most dailies focus on the new High Representative's promise to fight crime and corruption and eliminate the unemployment in BiH.

Dnevni Avaz, like all other media, writes about the program of the new High Representative, noting that "with this new approach, Ashdown is opening a new page in the prosperity of BiH." In an editorial, Fadil Mandal said that not a single government or political party in the past ten years has offered to BiH citizens such a comprehensive and universally acceptable program of political and economic reforms as did Paddy Ashdown. Moreover, notes Mandal, the High Representative's statement that the Dayton is a beginning and not the end, a basement and not the ceiling, clearly eliminates all illusions of secessionism within BiH. "By setting this sort of a political limit, he in start defined a political framework in which he intends to implement his encouraging program," concludes Mandal, adding that Ashdown has demonstrated yesterday that he is very well informed about the situation in BiH and that he knows the real cure for its diseases.

Jutarnje Novine carry two separate Op-Ed pieces on Ashdown's engagement. In his regular column, Almir Sarenkapa writes that the new High Representative will have a very difficult task of further building of this country and "working in the interest of its citizens as nearly as well as did his predecessor." Sarenkapa argues that there is room for optimism, as Ashdown has demonstrated on numerous occasions that he is committed to a strong engagement of the International Community in BiH. Moreover, his Monday address before the Parliament, notes the commentator, Ashdown emphasized that he will pay more attention to the interests of ordinary citizens, rather than insisting on a compromise. Finally, Sarenkapa writes that he is also somewhat skeptical about the success of the future High Representative, as he will be limited by interests of indecisive ambassadors of the Peace Implementation Council.

In a guest column in **Jutarnje Novine**, Izet Bazdarevic of the Federation Association of Judges, said that his association will strongly support the new High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, in implementing the reform of judiciary and establishing of the rule of law in BiH. Bazdarevic also commended Ashdown's insistence on justice and rights and interests of citizens and urged the establishment of the State Prosecutor and a State Court which would also prosecute cases of indicted war criminals from all parts of BiH.

Under the title "Nice words, deeds to follow", **Dnevni List** carries an editorial in which the author, Ivica Glibusic, writes that the "story in BiH remains the same, old and new High Representatives giving same speeches about next few years being critical for future of BiH." Glibusic, however, commends Ashdown's plans to fight against the organized crime, illegal structures and terrorism. He also terms positive the new High Representative's promise that he would not allow constitutional changes which would compromise the identity or security of a constituent people. Finally, Glibusic claims that "diplomatic circles expect that deprivation of Croats would continue and that the Dayton Peace Accord would be silently revised."

Under the title "Ashdown will adopt Westendorp and Petritsch's style of ruling", **Vjesnik's** Ivan Sabic carries a big summary of work of all previous High Representatives from the times of Carl Bildt to Wolfgang Petritsch. Sabic notes that the fact and the opinion polls which are showing a great influence of national parties indicate that BiH is not heading in the direction that would suite sponsors of the peace process. "Paddy Ashdown will continue to 'rule' like his predecessors Westendorp and Petritsch, because the other way - the regular procedure - brings key results very slowly or sometimes not at all.

Dnevni Avaz and Jutarnje Novine also carry excerpts of The London Times article about the mandate of the new high Representative, which was originally published in this paper on Monday.

Front-page Headlines on Ashdown

Dnevni Avaz: Ashdown's Great Speech: With completely new approach, Ashdown opens a new page in prosperity in BiH; Anti-corruption, cheaper state, development in business

Oslobodjenje: Paddy Ashdown: Crime and Corruption are a threat to citizens in BiH; Rule of Law

Jutarnje Novine: Ashdown takes over from Wolfgang Petritsch: Authorities are on the test, but I will not run away from imposing decisions

Dnevni List: Paddy Ashdown: Iron gate to the OHR will be opened for public

Vecernji List: Paddy Ashdown: There will be no division [of BiH] – I will allow dreams of Great Serbia and Great Croatia be revived

Nezavisne Novine: Time for a clash with crime

Slobodna Dalmacija: Paddy Ashdown takes over (page 3)

Vjesnik: "Ashdown announces great reforms in BiH

Who has been accused by CAFAO for organized crime in the RS Customs Administration

Nezavisne Novine continues publishing the recently issued CAFAO report related to the alleged criminal activities in the RS Customs Administration. The daily reports that it is still uncertain how exactly has CAFAO managed to collect the information publicized in its report and speculates that, apart from having an inside "informer", they have also bugged the Customs Administration. Nezavisne Novine draws the conclusion from the contents of the report, as mobile phone numbers of each person mentioned in the report are also included. The daily also said that two years ago, the CAFAO donated two vans equipped for wire tapping of mobile communications to the Customs Administrations of RS and BiH Federation.

The top story in this week's edition of a Banja Luka-based weekly magazine "Reporter" is the story about organized crime in the RS Customs Administration which involves some top RS politicians. Reporter writes that the politician who will benefit the most from the release of the CAFAO report is RS Prime Minister Mladen Ivanic who seriously hurt the SDS, the party which controls operations in the RS Customs Administration. The magazine writes that one of the key people on Ivanic's side is the current RS Finance Minister, Milenko Vracar, whose battle against the RS Customs Administration Director, Goran Popovic, has lasted for several months. It also says that the RS President, Mirko Sarovic, insisted that Vracar be dismissed but he did not manage to persuade Ivanic to do it. On the other hand, Vracar recently offered his resignation but he is still performing his duties. According to a Reporter's source, Ivanic will use this to 'put Vracar on a tight leash' because he is becoming too powerful. Ivanic fully trusts the Head of the RS Tax Administration Milica Bisic who has been in conflict for a long time with the RS vice-president and top SDS official Dragan Cavic. The magazine quotes an anonymous source as saying that the CAFAO report on the work of RS Customs Administration is also a result of the deal that Ivanic made with BiH Foreign Minister Zlatko Lagumdžija. According to the source, they agreed that it would be good that the 'ball comes to the RS's court' because Lagumdžija is having a hard time with numerous scandals that have been going in the BiH Federation such as "AM Sped", "Pogorelica" terrorist camp, selling weapons to Israel, etc.. They also agreed to surprise the new High Representative and set up a joint customs administration at BiH level. The joint customs administration will be located in a building in Marin dvor (one of Sarajevo neighborhoods). BiH Customs Administration will provide revenue for BiH common institutions while the entities' budgets will be filled with money collected from taxes and excises. The overall conclusion is that Ivanic will be the winner of this battle

because he cut off one of the main money sources of SDS, put Vracar on a tight leash and finally had the criminal charges against former RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, filed thus creating better conditions for his success in the October elections.

RS officials slam Petritsch's last minute decisions on judiciary

The highest RS officials have met yesterday in Banja Luka, in order to discuss the most recent decisions on judiciary made by the last High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, and to take a joint stand on it. The meeting was attended by the RS President, Mirko Sarovic, the RS Vice President, Dragan Cavic, the Speaker of the RS National Assembly, Dragan Kalinic, the RS Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, Mladen Ivanic and Petar Kunic, the RS Justice Minister, Biljana Maric, the President of the BiH Constitutional Court, Snezana Savic, the Chairman of the RS Supreme Court, Jovo Rosic, the RS Deputy Prosecutor, Jovan Spaic and the Chairman of the RS Constitutional Commission, Miroslav Mikes. Glas Srpski reports that the joint view of the RS officials is that the decisions made by the High Representative (Petritsch) represent a classic attack against the constitutional and legal system, and being such, also represent severe misuse of authorities. After the meeting, the RS President, Mirko Sarovic, stated that this is the worst way of leaving the country that a High Representative can choose. The daily quotes Sarovic: "One of the crucial questions is whether the High Representative can change the Constitution. In our view, he cannot. What he did, just prior to his departure, was completely unnecessary, due to the fact that it is a common knowledge that we support the reform of judiciary. We think that the High Representative misused his authority and the arguments are on our side. We expect the international community not to impose decisions but to create a partnership with us. The question is who is going to take the responsibility for the package of imposed laws and all the rest that will come out from the imposed decisions."

RTRS, Glas Srpski, FENA news agency and Oslobodjenje report that Petritsch's last minute Decision on judiciary was one of the dominant topics of yesterday's talks between the RS leadership and the new High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, during his visit to Banja Luka. Glas quotes Ashdown as saying that he supports the decisions made by his predecessor. "If anyone has any doubts about the legality of the Decisions imposed by the former High Representative, he should follow the legal system and address the European Court of Human Rights," said Ashdown following the meeting with the RS leadership. He added that the package of laws imposed by Wolfgang Petritsch at the end of his mandate represent the law and could be changed only in the legal process. (Similar report could also be found in FENA and Oslobodjenje)

RS political parties reactions on Petritsch's decisions

Glas Srpski carries numerous reactions by RS political parties on the decisions made by the former High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch. The Secretary General of the Serb Radical Party (SRS), **Ognjen Tadic**, stated that "such an undemocratic move never happened before in the entire history of the planet Earth." At a press conference held in Banja Luka, Tadic expressed expectation that the new High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, will make much more reasonable and democratic decisions, as he is familiar with the history of the Serb people. The Vice President of the Democratic National Alliance (DNS), **Jovan Mitrovic**, stated yesterday that his party expected the former High Representative to make few illegal decision but not that he will make so many illegal and anti- constitution decisions in one package. The member of the SDS Main Board, **Cvijetin Nikic**, stated that he expected the new High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, to work in the interest of all three nations, in accordance with provisions of the Dayton Agreement. Nikic condemned Petritsch's decision to impose forty new laws, just before the expiration of his mandate, which as he said is not an appropriate move for such a high profile diplomat. The RS Socialist Party strongly opposes the decisions of the former High Representative, by which he attempted to change the Constitution.

In a large column in Nozevisne Novine titled "How was the constitutional and legal position of RS changed: the imposed Constitution", the chairman of the RS Constitutional Commission, **Miroslav Mikes**, also questioned the authority of the High Representative to amend the Constitutions in the entities. He argues that the last moves made by Wolfgang Petritsch clearly demonstrated that BiH was turned into a protectorate, instead into a democratic country.

Reactions coming from the Federation are somewhat more neutral, if not entirely positive. While most officials, including the SDP's Karlo Filipovic and Party for BiH's Safet Halilovic, say that they are still looking into the imposed Decisions, the president of the Federation Association of Judges, Vlado Adamovic, said that he believes that the Decisions on the establishment of the High Judicial Council and new rules for selection of judges are contributing to the formation of the independent and democratic judiciary in BiH. Despite this, however, all three question the authority of the High Representative to amend the entity constitutions.

The deputy Speaker of the BiH Parliament's House of Peoples, Sejfudin Tokic, said that the imposed Decisions on judiciary will preclude obstructions by a number of political parties, alluding to the SDS and its satellite parties in the RS National Assembly. Tokic also called upon all his colleagues from the Parliament to urgently adopt all Decisions imposed by the High Representative and thereby demonstrate their dedication to a better functioning legal system in the country.

Removed judges from Herzegovina Neretva Canton claim that they were removed illegally

Dnevni List reported that, concerning suspension from the position of Judge of the Cantonal Court in Mostar and the claims that she has performed some illegal acts in the Hotel "ERO", Kata Zovko, removed by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, stated that all claims in the Decision of the High Representative are incorrect and staged. Zovko said that she worked according to the Constitution and the law in the subject mentioned. Zovko stated that the High Representative did not respect the law on function of judges and prosecutors in the Federation BiH that he pronounced himself, because, as Zovko said, she was never given opportunity to express her statement on eventual complaints. The removed judge of Municipal Court Mostar I, Nenad Gvozdic, also denied all the claims from the Decision of the High Representative, emphasising that he did not act partially and was always acting in accordance to the Constitution and law.

Head of Grude Police organized demonstrations during the raid in Hercegovacka Banka?

The article, signed by Ruzica Luburic, reports that the investigative team of Dnevni List revealed that Dobrislav Galic, the Head of the Grude Municipality, is the most responsible person for the riots in front of the Hercegovacka Banka in Grude. According to the daily, Galic called on people via the Radio Grude to gather in front of the bank. After Galic, Marinko Sosa Zvijezda, a military Commander, did the same on the same radio station. Half an hour later, Miro Tomas, a Manager of Construction Company 'Toming', blocked the road. The article says that people gathered around the bank in a very short period of time because Radio Grude said that SFOR attacked the Croat people and that they should create unrest 'as a sign of defense'. The article says that a company of Srecko Nikic also came on time and as a sort of commandos he was standing on the front door of the bank whole day long, giving orders, while Marinko Sosa had a microphone that he used to give orders as to who will roll over SFOR vehicles. Everything what was going on in front of the bank was recorded and the tape was sent to certain Dumancic in the Police Administration in Ljubuski, however, Dumancic did not hand over the tape to the IPTF. Allegedly, the tape 'was lost' and the article says that Dumancic was paid to arrange for this. The article says that since someone had to be held accountable innocent people were accused of rolling over the vehicles although it will be determined afterwards that on that day they were not even in Grude. Ranko Zulj, a policeman from village Ruzici, handed over the tape to Dumancic. That afternoon the biggest riots started and Miro Tomas, Marinko Sosa Zvijezda and Srecko Nikic were 'the loudest ones'. A Manager of company Autoherz also joined them and he hit an interpreter, who was 65 years old at the bank's front door. The article says that it seems that at that time already there was no money in the bank because, thanks to informers, the bosses from Grude withdrew their money two or three days before SFOR entered the bank. Citizens of Grude, who wanted to stay anonymous, stated that all this happened because of individuals such as Miro Tomas, who had 2 million Marks in the bank or local power-wielder Ljubic. The article says that 'the whole circus' finished about 21:00 and while the SFOR vehicles were still burning, the preparations for the party in Grude were underway.

People from Grude also said that innocent policemen did not react because they were threatened. The article says

that the policemen also did not want to say anything for DL or they were not allowed to do it. Dnevni List received information that thanks to IPTF they returned to their jobs. Citizens of Grude say that the authority of the Grude Municipality and local tycoons stand behind all these problems. According to DL information, 12 policemen, who were set up, work in Grude and they have to obey political orders, however, it will change soon because people from Grude say that the authority is to face a collapse and irregular sessions are taking place every day. The article says that people are afraid. According to one citizen from Grude, all these things were done by the people controlled by the Head of Grude Municipality, who arranged that these people get flats, business premises and construction plots. He added that some of these people even hide after their names were published in Dnevni List regarding the privatization of companies in Grude. The article says that trade company Bekija Grude was sold to Miro Palac, the owner of Autoherz and the workers of this company do not know yet that the company was sold. Also, the Head of the Grude Municipality said that the machines from 'Zenicka' company do not function, however, they were sent to the USA and then sold to Korea. Also, Tobacco Factory in Grude was sold to Eronet for 2 million Marks (although it has been estimated that it is worth 6 million Marks), however, money only exists on the paper. Asked to comment on Eronet, people from Grude said that many owners of Eronet are Generals and they will not fail certainly. People from Grude say that Petritsch was bought in return for Eronet and if Petritsch was bought for these policemen from Grude then it would be right. They say that Petritsch certainly received the money before the end of the mandate.

The article concludes that DL is the first one that started to write about back-stage acts of local cheaters and they believe that people will also start to feel free to talk about these issues.

BiH Presidency leaves decision on state defense structures to the entities

At a regular session on Monday, the BiH Presidency decided not to make a decision on the organization of defense structures at the state level and, instead, leave this issue to the entities. According to the media, this was a unanimous decision by all three members of the Presidency. At a press conference following the session, Zivko Radisic said that the issues pertaining to the restructuring of the state defense need to be agreed with prior approval of the entities. "Therefore, we have started the initiative that legislative and executive bodies in the entities decide as to the manner in which issues of this sort will be discussed at the state level," said Radisic, adding that he hopes that the entity leadership will demonstrate a general interest in putting BiH on its way to Europe.

Elections Commission finalizes the list of officials banned from running in the elections

Dnevni Avaz reports that the BiH Election Commission finalized on Monday the list of persons who will not be permitted to run in the upcoming elections because they have been removed by the Decision of the High Representative, Elections Appeals Sub-commission (EASC) or the Provisional Elections Commission (PEC), IPTF or COMSFOR, and political parties whose senior officials have been removed by the OHR, PEC, or EASC for obstruction of the Dayton Agreement. The daily carries the full list with names of removed officials.

Reisu-l-ulema issues official proclamation that all the killed in Srebrenica tragedy be finally buried

During his yesterday's visit to Srebrenica, the head of the Islamic Community in BiH, Resiu-l-Ulema, Mustafa ef.. Ceric, issued *fatwa* (religious proclamation) asking for the burial of all exhumed and identified bodies of those killed

in the Srebrenica massacre in 1995. Ceric stressed that Sariat law requires the burial of the dead and appropriate accompanying religious service. In addition, Ceric expressed his dissatisfaction over the fact that there has been no concrete progress in construction of the Memorial Center in Potocari, and strongly criticized the OHR for “failing to coordinate the activities pertaining to the construction of the Memorial Center.” According to him, the Islamic Community and several survivors’ associations from Srebrenica have already submitted the proposed plan for the Center, but the OHR failed to open an official tender for the plans.

High Representative to visit Bobita company in Citluk

Dnevni Avaz reports that the new High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, will visit on Tuesday the Bobita alcohol beverage production company in Citluk. In a statement for the daily, Marinko Sulic, the company director, said that he is flattered by the announced visit, and added that Bobita is one of the rare companies in BiH which has never been connected with any political party. Sulic also said that he will inform Ashdown about problems plaguing this field of economy and the entire Federation, in particular, the illegal breweries and smuggling of alcohol and cigarettes.

Dnevni List also reports on this and quotes Sulic as saying that the Ashdown’s visit is caused by economic concerns, and adds that the fact that the new “High Representative is Irish” may also have something to do with it.