

BiH Media Round-up, 18/3/2002

BiH State-related Issues

- BiH House of Representatives confirms the appointment of new chair of the Council of Ministers
- New prime minister outlines government priorities
- Yugoslav ambassador in BiH: Attitude of Serbia and Montenegro towards BiH will not change
- Tomac: Croatia will not ratify the Agreement on Ploce port

Constitutional Reform

- Party leaders and High Representative to resume talks on constitutional changes in the entities
- RS National Assembly to vote on constitutional changes if leaders fail to agree
- Haris Silajdzic warns: Those who committed genocide cannot be rewarded
- Zlatko Lagumdžija: We can agree about constitutional changes
- Wolfgang Petritsch meets with HDZ representatives
- Kresimir Zubak: I am not satisfied with the way in which Petritsch is conducting talks
- High Representative discusses constitutional changes with Alija Izetbegovic
- Stiglmeier on Petritsch – Izetbegovic talks: There was no agreement
- Milorad Dodik says political parties from the BiH Federation want a change of political system
- Federation parties say idea to abolish Federation good, but hard to implement

Federation

- Croatian press cites exodus of Croats from Drvar
- Mayor of Mostar Neven Tomic withdraws his resignation
- HPT Mostar rejects responsibility for Eronet not getting third license

Republika Srpska

- Bomb thrown at mosque in Kozarska Dubica
- PDP Congress: Ivanic re-elected president
- White Mosque in Srebrenica to be reconstructed by the end of the year
- Serb Radicals to nominate Poplasen for president in October elections
- PDP asks for cantonization of Croatia and condemns statements by the Croatian Parliament's speaker

International Community

- Petritsch presides over the first Cabinet meeting: New phase in the engagement of the International Community
- Paddy Ashdown testifies in Milosevic case: I told you would be here!
- Oslobodjenje cities The Economist: Dream team in the Balkans
- SFOR set up checkpoints in eastern BiH
- BiH Refugee Minister meets PDHR Hays and World Bank's Joe Ingram: It is necessary to animate potential donors
- Serbia's deputy Prime Minister released after being held on suspicion of spying
- Zdravko Tomac, Deputy Speaker of Croatian Parliament: We shall not allow that protectorate from BiH transfers to Croatia

Editorials

Headlines

BiH State-related Issues

BIH House of Representatives confirms the appointment of new chair of the Council of Ministers

The BiH Parliament's House of Representatives confirmed on Friday the appointment of Dragan Mikerevic as new chairman of the BiH Council of Ministers. Mikerevic, who is also the Minister for European integration, will replace outgoing chairman Zlatko Lagumdžija in accordance with the rotation

principle. 25 deputies votes for the appointment, seven voted against while six deputies were abstained.

New prime minister outlines government priorities

Weekend edition of Nezavisne novine reports that the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly endorsed on Friday the appointment of the current minister for European Integration, Dragan Mikerevic, as new chairman of the BiH Council of Ministers. Mikerevic will hold this post for the next eight months. In his introductory speech, Dragan Mikerevic said that the CoM would continue its current policy. He also explained that this was the main reason why he did not submit a new program. He singled out attracting foreign investment as one of the main priorities of the CoM. "I am aware of the high unemployment rate and I believe that this problem can be solved only through production growth and export. Currently we are making use of just a third of our production resources. Our priority is to improve this record although we are aware that lack of capital will still remain a limiting factor", said Mikerevic. He also underlined the importance of political stability and the fight against corruption. "We can realistically expect some positive developments as we are determined to begin implementing justice reforms and restructuring justice institutions. The affirmation of the rule of law should increase confidence amongst potential foreign investors", said Mikerevic. He also stress the need for establishing a single BiH market and obligations which BiH has to fulfil in order to be admitted to Europe.

Yugoslav ambassador in BiH: Attitude of Serbia and Montenegro towards BiH will not change

In a short interview with Dnevni Avaz on Saturday, Stanimir Vukicevic, the Yugoslav ambassador to BiH said that the relations between his country (soon to be called Serbia and Montenegro) and BiH will not change with the change of

Yugoslavia's name. "It is a common interests of Serbia and Montenegro to have very good relations with BiH, and they have already demonstrated this. It is no secret that BiH is an absolute priority for us. She is our neighbor country and one should not expect any changes in our relationship towards BiH," Vukicevic stressed.

Tomac: Croatia will not ratify the Agreement on Ploce port

In a statement for Dnevni Avaz on Sunday, the speaker of the Croatian Parliament, Zdravko Tomac, said that the Croatian Parliament will not ratify the Agreement on use of Ploce port because of the controversial Article 9, which stipulates that all possible disputes would be resolved by an international mediator. Tomac said that this provision is unacceptable for Croatia which believes that all disputes could be resolved by two states, rather than a foreigner. "I really don't understand some BIH politicians who ask for a protectorate instead of wanting the two states to tackle the problems," Tomac said, stressing again that this provision will not pass the Croatian Parliament.

Article 9 is equally contentious in BiH, note the media, as it caused most serious conflict yet between the SDP and Party for BiH. (see also the last item under International Community)

Constitutional Reform

Party leaders and High Representative to resume talks on constitutional changes in the entities

Representatives of eight ruling parties in BiH and the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, will resume early today (Monday) talks on constitutional changes in BiH entities. There is a general agreement among BiH politicians and public that the next two days will be crucial for the future of BiH,

however there is a great deal of speculation as to how constitutional changes will come about – Will they be agreed upon by political leaders or will they be imposed by the High Representative?

Federation Television and Dnevni Avaz quote OHR spokesperson, Alexandra Stiglmeier, as saying that the High Representative stressed, once again, how important it is that local politicians reach solutions. "This is the final round of discussion and the OHR believes that the agreement is possible," said Stiglmeier, adding that it would be sad if BiH officials fail to reach an agreement six years after Dayton.

Federation TV quotes the RS Prime Minister, Mladen Ivanic, as saying that if the talks in the OHR fail to bring adequate solutions, the RS National Assembly will be called to adopt constitutional amendments proposed by the RS Constitutional Commission. Ivanic was confident that the amendments will be adequate and in line with European standards, Venice Commission and the Constitutional Court's ruling on constituency of peoples. He stressed, however, that any imposed solutions will not be acceptable for RS authorities.

RS president, Mirko Sarovic, echoed Ivanic, also stressing that RS authorities will not be able to implement the imposed solutions. "Imposed solution would bring about a very difficult situation. They would block political life in the RS and BiH, in general," said Sarovic.

However, Stiglmeier, dismissed criticism of RS politicians. She said that party leaders should focus on trying to reach a compromise on their own. Stiglmeier also said that the High Representative spent a busy weekend contacting EU representatives and European governments, asking them to encourage BiH leaders to make their own decision on constitutional reform. "It would look very bad for BiH if the talks failed," said Stiglmeier. (Dnevni Avaz carries similar report on page 2)

RS National Assembly to vote on constitutional changes if leaders fail to agree

The head of the RS Constitutional Commission, Miroslav Mikes, said on Saturday that the Assembly and the Commission would hold sessions after the next round of talks on constitutional amendments between the leaders of eight ruling parties in BiH and the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, irrespective of the outcome. Mikes told SRNA (and Oslobodjenje reports) that it would be best if the parties reached a political agreement as the constitutional amendments would no longer pose a problem for parliament and the commission. "If the parties fail to reach an agreement, the constitutional amendments will be discussed in the RS National Assembly and the outcome will depend on a vote there," Mikes concluded.

The leaders of the eight parties will resume the talks on constitutional reforms on Monday (today).

Haris Silajdzic warns: Those who committed genocide cannot be rewarded

In an interview with the Istanbul CNN, the founder of the Party for BiH and former BiH Foreign Minister, Haris Silajdzic, said that he is surprised that the International Community keeps insisting on solutions which are not in the spirit of Dayton, but entity divisions. "Those who committed genocide cannot be rewarded by making concessions about the implementation of the Constitutional Court's ruling on constituent status of peoples in BiH," said Silajdzic. The interview will be aired later today (Monday) on CNN Europe. (Avaz carried the preview)

Zlatko Lagumdzija: We can agree about constitutional changes

In an interview with today's Jutarnje Novine, the SDP leader and BiH Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zlatko Lagumdzija, said that he believes that BiH politicians can agree on

constitutional changes in the entities on their own. "I will be here (in Sarajevo attending the talks in the OHR) on Monday, but on Tuesday, I am going to Strassbourg. I hope everything will be over while I am still here," Lagumdžija said. He added that the SDP advocates the creation of bicameral parliaments in both entities and symmetric solutions in Federation and RS, in general. Lagumdžija explained that the House of Peoples in the RS should have the same role as its counterpart in the Federation, be based on the principle of parity, however, it should have a lower number of deputies to reflect the population size in the RS. "In the end, the function of this chamber, and not its name is important, how it protects the vital national interests..." Lagumdžija said at the end.

Wolfgang Petritsch meets with HDZ representatives

Dnevni Avaz reports that the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, met on Sunday in Mostar with representatives of the HDZ and discussed with them the ongoing constitutional changes in the entities. "The High Representative called once again representatives of this party to be more constructive. This is a historic decision which will determine the rights and participation in authority of Croats in both entities," said OHR spokesperson, Alexandra Stiglmeier. During his visit to Mostar, Petritsch met with Niko Lozancic, Mariofil Ljubic and Berisa Colak and the Catholic Cardinal Vinko Puljic.

Slobodna Dalmacija quotes the High Representative as saying that he had told the HDZ representatives that a fair solution with regards to the constitutional changes would have to be found in the next two days, a solution which would satisfy all three peoples. Petritsch stressed that he informed the HDZ representatives about the proposed constitutional changes which would allow Croats to be a constituent people in the RS, possibility to have Croat Ministers in the Government, its representatives in the Parliament and representation in bodies such as the House of Peoples, which will be established in the

RS, and in the administration and judiciary. Petritsch said that it was important that all participants in the talks on constitutional changes took a constructive stance, stressing that it is important that Croat representatives engage in the talks because the HDZ BiH has been blocking this process and standing aside passively for too long. Petritsch emphasized that if the HDZ fails to protect Croats' interests somebody else will do this. "I can guarantee you that the Croats would get all the rights in BiH, constituent status in whole BiH and that every returnee to Banja Luka and the RS would have all the rights of a constituent people and rights of vital interests", said Petritsch.

Niko Lozancic, Vice President of the HDZ BiH, told SD that the HDZ BiH has been threatened to adopt the proposals. He stressed that the HDZ could not accept imposed solutions because of the responsibility towards its people. "It is indicative that the High Representative offers all the rights to the Croats and does not mention the other two peoples", reads SD. "We are for the same rights for Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs in BiH", said Lozancic.

Vecernji List also reports on Petritsch's visit to Mostar, and his talks with an HDZ delegation. The daily notes, quoting foreign diplomats and BiH officials, that it is the Croats who are labeled the biggest losers in the talks, and who are allegedly the greatest obstacle to the Serb-Bosniak 'compromise'. During yesterday's meeting in Mostar, the HDZ delegation told the High Representative that they it not accept solutions which do not offer a full national equality in BiH and entities' institutions. It is indicative that, with regard to this issue, NHI and HDZ agree. According to an anonymous source, Kresimir Zubak was equally radical when he demanded identical solutions for all three peoples. Simultaneously with the continuation of the talks, diplomats of European countries, which are members of the Peace Implementation Council, especially those from France, are

exerting pressure on the Croat side in order to make it succumb to pressure accept the 10% participation in authority in both entities without a parity principle and equal representation. These diplomatic representatives openly support the strengthening of the present concept of the Serb and Bosniak entity, and the High Representative and the International Administration in BiH, according to the daily, are not far from these positions. In the projection of the constitutional changes, Vecernji List notes, the Croats are only theoretically one of three constituent peoples in BiH. According to the claims of an HDZ representative, who wanted to stay anonymous, the IC 'threatens' HDZ that it will reveal the findings of the investigation on Herecegovacka Bank, by which the constitutional changes should be relativized and by which unfavorable solutions for the Croats would be concealed. The anonymous source says that, at the same time, in the talks with Croat officials from BiH, the official Zagreb is expressing its understanding over unfavorable course of the talks on the constitutional changes in BiH and he added 'that they cannot make more serious moves'.

NOTE: **Dnevni list** also reported that during his meetings with HDZ representatives, the High Representative threatened issuing warrants of arrests for several HDZ officials, including Ante Jelavic, Marko Tokic and Stanko Sopta Baja, if Croats fail to accept the proposed constitutional changes. However, OHR spokesman Mario Brckic strongly dismissed these allegations. In a statement for Zagreb's Vecernji List, Brkic said that the main topic of Sunday talks was the implementation of the Constitutional Court ruling. "Allegations are a pure fiction of certain political circles that Dnevni List is serving in order to disrupt the ongoing CoCo discussions. High Representative was certainly not showing any arrest warrants. This is a shame for journalism," Brckic said.

Kresimir Zubak: I am not satisfied with the way in which Petritsch is conducting talks

In a statement for Slobodna Dalmacija, Kresimir Zubak of the NHI said that the High Representative is "trying to present issues which have not been resolved as if they are already settled." Zubak said that it will be very difficult to reach an agreement and that, in that case, the High Representative will have to arbitrate and impose a decision. He added that it is obvious that Petritsch is trying to change the agreement made at the Federation level.

Zubak dismissed allegations that HDZ is obstructing the talks, saying that the High Representative made this conclusion based on the fact that Mariofil Ljubic left the meeting to take part in an HDZ session. According to Zubak, Ljubic announced that he will be present for one hour only because he has the session of the Central Board and the High Representative accepted this.

In a separate statement for Jutarnji List, Zubak said that he is not satisfied with the way in which the High Representative is conducting the talks. "I think that he is not objective. There can be no dispute about the rights and full equality of people," said Zubak. He explained that Croats, as smallest people in both entities, need strong institutions to protect them. "If this does not happen, then it is legitimate to question why BiH needs entities at all. Also, it is completely legitimate to talk about the third entity for Croats," Zubak said, adding that the positions of NHI, SDP and HDZ have identical positions on this issue.

High Representative discusses constitutional changes with Alija Izetbegovic

The honorary chairman of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), Alija Izetbegovic, and the High Representative of the international community, Wolfgang Petritsch, discussed on

Saturday the implementation of the BiH Constitutional Court's decision on the constituent status of all peoples in BiH and agreed that solutions had to be symmetrical in both entities. According to the statement issued by the SDA, Petritsch and Izetbegovic concluded that the constitutional amendments had to secure full equality of the peoples in both entities, symmetric solutions and that the executive and judicial authorities had to reflect the 1991 census. "Things are really changing in the Balkans but I believe that BiH will become a normal state if its neighbours behave in a friendly way and if the international community gets more involved," Petritsch was quoted as saying during his talks with Izetbegovic. Petritsch also said that this was what the international community had opted for and that it would not abandon this course, the SDA public relations office said in the statement. Nearly all RS and Federation media carried this item – Oslobodjenje under title "Petritsch and Izetbegovic support symmetric solutions". The item was also one of the leading news items in RTRS and Federation TV prime time news)

Commenting on the meeting, the president of the Party of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), Milorad Dodik said that the meeting between Alija Izetbegovic and Wolfgang Petritsch was a clear example of politicization of the issue of constitutional reform. "I am not disputing the High Representative's right to meet with anyone. However, judging from the content of the talks we have had so far, it is clear that Alija Izetbegovic's favourite views cannot be supported," Dodik told SRNA. Dodik added that Alija Izetbegovic should stop "meddling in these issues".

Stiglmayer on Petritsch – Izetbegovic talks: There was no agreement

The OHR Spokesperson, Alexandra Stiglmayer stated for Nezavisne novine that the topic of discussion between the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch and the honorary Chairman of SDA, Alija Izetbegovic, was the implementation of the BiH

Constitutional Court decision. She, however, stressed that no agreement between the two was reached on the 1991 Census as a basis for distribution of power, and symmetry in both entities. Stiglsmayer said that the High Representative reminded Izetbegovic that the Steering Board, in June last year, asked for the symmetry in the essence and in the principle but that that did not mean that the solutions have to be identical. Symmetry implies that solutions have to have the same effect, not to be identical, Stiglsmayer said and added that the High Representative urges the political parties which participate in the negotiations to find solutions. NN quotes Stiglsmayer as saying: "The OHR attitude is that the representatives of all three nations have to find the way how to implement the decision of the BiH Constitutional Court. It is clear that the decision has to be implemented with no compromise, but that a political agreement is necessary. The High Representative will not force a specific solution. The final agreement is up to the parties which have to agree on the essence."

Dodik says political parties from the BiH Federation want a change of political system

Weekend edition of Nezavisne novine reports that president of the Party of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) and former RS prime minister, Milorad Dodik accused political parties from the BiH Federation of sticking to their maximum demands regarding the talks on constitutional changes. Dodik said that that the political parties from the BiH Federation had refused to accept a compromise offered by political parties from the RS thus proving one more time that through the constitutional reform they want to change the entire political system in BiH. "If the elimination of entities is not possible, then they will try to set up a system which will, in a year or two, prove to be inefficient and they will call for radical changes", Dodik told Nezavisne novine and added that at the Monday's meeting the parties involved in the talks will have

to say whether it is possible to make a compromise or not. "Extreme views presented by the representatives of the Croat parties from BiH show that there is a coordination and that these views were agreed on by Croat authorities in Zagreb and the representatives of Croat parties in BiH", said Dodik and added that an interference of one state in internal affairs of another state is not a common diplomatic practice, that is, that authorities of the neighbouring state are putting so much effort in trying to define internal political structure of the other state. He also said that the Croat authorities in Zagreb had to be aware of that solutions that pertain to BiH have to be a result of negotiations between BiH politicians and not a result of a interference from abroad.

Federation parties say idea to abolish Federation good, but hard to implement

Several political parties in the Federation reacted to the last week statement by the BOSS (Bosnian Party) leader, Mirnes Ajanovic, who said that the Federation authorities should abolish the entity thereby necessitating the abolishment of the RS as well.

SDA's Sulejman Tihic said that his party would like to see BiH as a multiethnic country comprised of a number of multiethnic regions, however, he stressed that "entities are present BIH reality with an expiration date." "The entities will disappear, that is completely imminent, but, at this time, there are no political conditions to make this happen," Tihic explained.

Safet Halilovic of the Party for BiH stressed that his party, too, would like to see BiH without entities, but also conceded that this is not possible at the moment. He also added that demands for the abolishment of entities go beyond discussion on harmonization of entity and state constitution, and refer to the changes of the later one. "And this can happen only by a consensus," Halilovic said.

HDZ's Niko Lozancic said his party does not think that by abolishing the Federation, the RS would be abolished as well. Lozancic said that the HDZ would like to see cantonized BiH without entities, but stressed that this cannot happen by a unilateral abolishment of only one entity. (Oslobodjenje collected reactions of party representatives)

Federation

Croatian press cites exodus of Croats from Drvar

Croatian press over the weekend and today devoted a great deal of attention to what they term is an "exodus of Croats from Drvar and BiH." Dnevni list, Vjesnik, Jutarnji List and Slobodna Dalmacija write about the group of some 30 Croats who were illegally occupying apartments and houses in Drvar and who, after the recent eviction, moved to Croatia. According to Vjesnik, the Croatian government also expressed concern about this issue, saying that it will ask BiH authorities to coordinate the eviction process in Drvar with allocation of alternative accommodation for those who had to leave apartments in Drvar.

Mayor of Mostar Neven Tomic withdraws his resignation

(provided by OHR Mostar)

Dnevni List carries a hefty and very speculative article about the resignation of Mostar Mayor Neven Tomic saying that connoisseurs knew from the start that it was a case of a political game of Neven Tomic and representatives of international community who are to assist him to stay in the office. The daily says that the problem lies in the fact that a rotation in the offices of Mostar Mayor and Deputy Mayor is suppose to take place soon and that it is clear that in the current circumstances Tomic would not get a two-thirds

majority required for an appointment to one of the leading offices (Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Mostar). DL puts this in the context of the recent rotation in the office of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton Governor when Dragan Vrankic was appointed Governor and Sefkija Dziho Deputy Governor of the HNC reminding of a provision which stipulates that the Mayor of Mostar and HNC Governor cannot come from a line of one people. The daily speculates that Tomic's resignation had an aim to exert pressure on the IC which would have to engage itself more to find a solution which would secure Tomic's survival in the Mayor's office, otherwise Tomic would just "walk out" with dignity because he would not allow to be replaced by the HDZ.

In relation to Tomic's resignation which is suppose to be discussed at the next session of the City Council, DL reads that if one takes into consideration the fact that the agenda has to be adopted by both the Chair and Deputy Chair of the City Council, in this case by Milan Jovicic and Ante Vidacak, it is likely that Tomic's resignation and the aforementioned rotation will not be put on the agenda of the City Council due to the fact that Milan Jovicic is, as DL puts it, a yes-man of the IC. On the other hand, reads DL, Councilors can move for changes to the agenda at sessions if they secure a simple majority (DL learns from its sources that the HDZ has managed to secure it through lobbying) and unless one of the constituent peoples invokes the vital national interest clause. "In light of that one can expect, despite pressures coming from the OHR, that the issue of Neven Tomic's resignation will be put on the agenda of the next session of the City Council next week (...) It is because of that that Tomic, with a help from the OHR, tried to prevent the issue of the resignation to be put on the agenda and when he failed he announced the withdrawal of his resignation and his stay is the Mayor's office", reads Dnevni List. The daily also learns from a source close to the City Administration that the OHR representatives have been lately rendering issues which should

be on the agenda of the Mostar City Council trying to avoid the issue of Tomic's resignation. DL also speculates that there could be another twist in the matter, the twist being that Tomic withdraws the resignation in the written form, the Bosniaks agree with that, albeit it would oppose current regulations, and then the Croats, after "figuring out" that the regulations have been breached, would request protection of a vital national interest of another people, the Bosniaks.

HPT Mostar rejects responsibility for Eronet not getting third license

(provided by OHR Mostar)

Dnevni List carries a reaction of the HPT Mostar to the statement of the "Eronet" principles who recently stated that the HPT Mostar refused to accept 1% of Eronet shares owned by Croherc company thus denying Eronet the necessary licence, the licence which can be secured if the state has a share in the company's capital. HPT Mostar acknowledges that they have been offered the 1% by Ms. Toby Robinson, who wanted to get the licence through granting of the share to the HPT Mostar, and that the Steering Board of the HPT declined the offer. Explaining the decision, the HPT Mostar reiterates that the HPT Mostar had 51% of Eronet shares which were subsequently illegally transferred to two private companies and that the Federation Privatization Agency has ordered that the shares be returned to the HPT Mostar which has not been carried out yet.

Republika Srpska

Bomb thrown at mosque in Kozarska Dubica

Unidentified assailants threw an explosive device at a mosque in a village in the RS over the weekend, causing minor damage but no injuries, police said on Monday. The attack, apparently with a grenade, occurred in the night between Saturday and

Sunday near Kozarska Dubica, 90 kilometres northwest of Banja Luka, AFP reports.

PDP Congress: Ivanic re-elected president

Both Banja Luka dailies report that at Sunday's PDP congress, Mladen Ivanic was re-elected president of the party while Goran Milojevic and Zoran Djeric were elected vice-presidents. Djeric underlined that the PDP intended to run for the elections in the BiH Federation stressing that this party has already formed initiative boards in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Glamoc, Maglaj and Zavidovici while in Mostar the PDP has formed a town board. Addressing the Congress, RS Prime Minister Mladen Ivanic said that thanks to the RS Government the RS is no longer under pressure of some representatives of the International Community. "We are equally accepted and we do not have major political problems. We have managed to ensure the stability of the RS institutions and we also get an equal treatment in the talks on constitutional changes", said Ivanic.

White Mosque in Srebrenica to be reconstructed by the end of the year

Oslobodjenje and Dnevni Avaz report that the reconstruction of the so-called White Mosque in Srebrenica should begin by mid-2002. The president of town's municipal assembly, Sadik Ahmetovic, said that the construction material has been secured by the Federation Ministry of Refugees, while the works will be paid by the Malaysian government. The dailies note that multiethnic authority in Srebrenica and its citizens would like to see this mosque rebuilt.

The head of the OHR office in Srebrenica, Charlie Powell, told Oslobodjenje that he was not informed about the construction plans, but stressed that this is a positive development. "There are many returnees in the town and their needs need to be fulfilled," Powell said.

Serb Radicals to nominate Poplasen for president in October elections

The Serb Radical Party (SRS) in BiH will nominate Nikola Poplasen for the RS president in the October elections, SRS executive board chairman Mirko Blagojevic said on Friday. ONASA news agency quotes Blagojevic as saying that the SRS and the RS "do not have a better candidate for president than Poplasen".

"That was best seen in the democratic elections in 1998, when Poplasen won by a landslide and became the RS president," Blagojevic said. Poplasen was removed from the post of the RS president in March 1999 by former High Representative in BiH Carlos Westendorp, due to obstruction of the Dayton Peace Agreement. At the same time, Poplasen's party, SRS, was banned from participating in the elections by the OHR and the OSCE.

PDP asks for cantonization of Croatia and condemns statements by the Croatian Parliament's speaker

The Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) has urged the international community to force Croatia to return the constituent status to its Serbs and to return their autonomy by cantonizing the state, Velimir Sakan, a member of the PDP main committee, said on Saturday. Sakan said that three cantons should be established in Croatia, encompassing Krajina, eastern Slavonia and western Slavonia. "The return of the constituent status and cantonization would create all the preconditions needed for the Serbs, and in this way Croatia would show that it has good intentions in its relations with BiH," Sakan told a news conference in Banja Luka.

He recalled that Croatian Parliament's Deputy Speaker Zdravko Tomac's warmongering rhetoric during the conflict in Croatia had contributed to the ethnic cleansing drive against the Serbs and added that Tomac should be brought before The Hague tribunal to answer for his acts.

Sakan also condemned the recent statements made by Tomac and which were “directed against the Dayton Agreement and the RS”[Tomac said that the RS should be abolished]. “The PDP expects the new chairman of the Council of Ministers, Dragan Mikerevic, to tackle the recent statements made in Croatia because they deserve to be condemned from the most senior government post,” Sakan said.

International Community

Petritsch presides over the first Cabinet meeting: New phase in the engagement of the International Community

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, chaired on Thursday the first meeting of the Cabinet, which is composed of the heads of international organisations and missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Cabinet as well as four new inter-agency task forces – dealing with economic reform, return and reconstruction, institution building and rule of law – are the core elements of the restructured and refined international engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This streamlined set up was endorsed by the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) in Brussels on 28 February this year.

This first meeting of the Cabinet was attended by COMSFOR, Lt. General John Sylvester, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General, Jacques-Paul Klein, IPTF Commissioner, Vincent Coeurderoy, Head of the OSCE Mission in BiH, Robert Beecroft, Deputy Chief of the UNHCR Mission, Udo Janz, the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Henrik Kolstrup, World Bank Director, Joseph Ingram, and the European Commission’s Charge d’Affaires, Renzo Daviddi.

(Dnevni Avaz carries the [OHR press release](#) and additional comment by

Oleg Milisic on page 2 – very prominently, Oslobođenje on page 3, electronic media did not report on the meeting)

Paddy Ashdown testifies in Milosevic case: I told you would be here!

Slobodan Milosevic questioned on Friday he former leader of the British Liberal Democratic party, Paddy Ashdown, cross examining a Western diplomat for the first time in his trial for war crimes. Questioning one of his long-time critics, Milosevic was sharp to react when Ashdown told the court he had warned the former Yugoslav president he would end up in the court one day over Belgrade's repression in Kosovo. "I warned you that if you took these steps and went on doing this you would end up in this court and here you are!" said Ashdown, recalling a conversation with Milosevic after visiting Kosovo in 1998 to investigate claims by the ethnic Albanian community of repression at the hands of Serb forces.

"Could the witness please answer my questions and not make speeches," Milosevic replied acidly. However, as western media report, the relaxed and eloquent diplomat conceded nothing to the former Yugoslav president. (Dnevni Avaz, Oslobođenje, FTV and RTRS also reported on the Ashdown's appearance in The Hague)

Oslobođenje cites The Economist: Dream team in the Balkans

Monday's Oslobođenje carries a lengthy summary of the article recently published in The Economist about the team of experienced and well-prepared international diplomats who are leading the Balkans, including BiH, into the right direction. Click [here](#) for the full article.

SFOR set up checkpoints in eastern BiH

SFOR troops set up checkpoints for several hours along the

main road in eastern BiH near the border with Serbia on Friday, in an operation whose nature they declined to disclose. Several checkpoints were set up early on Friday but lifted later in the afternoon, said Zoran Glusac, spokesman for the RS interior ministry. He said the SFOR has not informed RS authorities about the exercise. Glusac said police in Zvornik were told that the operations were a joint exercise between SFOR and border police. SFOR spokesman Scott Lundy said earlier Friday the controls were "a regular operation." "We are working with the State Border Service. It is not considered out of the ordinary," said Lundy, without elaborating. However the head of the SBS, Mile Juric, denied this, adding that the SBS is not currently engaged in any joint action with SFOR and stressed that this agency has not even been informed about the ongoing exercise. (All Federation media reported on Friday and Saturday about the checkpoint)

BiH Refugee Minister meets PDHR Hays and World Bank's Joe Ingram: It is necessary to animate potential donors

Fena reports (Avaz and Oslobodjenje carry) that the BiH Minister for Refugees and DPs, Kresimir Zubak, received on Friday the Principal Deputy High Representative, Donald Hays, and the Resident Representative of the World Bank, Joe Ingram. Most dominant topic of discussion between the three officials was refugee return and ways of improving this important process. The three agreed to consider joint projects and additionally animate potential donors to take a more active part in the return process.

Serbia's deputy Prime Minister released after being held on suspicion of spying

A Belgrade military court released on Saturday Serbia's deputy prime minister Momcilo Perisic, detained two days ago along with a US diplomat on suspicion of spying. Perisic, also a former army chief, was arrested on Thursday along with

diplomat John David Neighbor and two other people on suspicion of "spying and revealing military secrets." The investigating judge ruled after a further interrogation of Perisic on Saturday that there was "no basis in law" to keep the men in detention. According to media reports, the FRY President, Vojislav Kostunica, also expressed his regret about the arrest and added that he hopes that this incident will not cause any damage to the relations between Belgrade and Washington. (All media in Federation and RS reported on Perisic's arrest)

Zdravko Tomac, Deputy Speaker of Croatian Parliament: We shall not allow that protectorate from BiH transfers to Croatia

(Provided by OHR Mostar)

Commenting on the statement of Velimir Sakan from PDP to proclaim Tomac a *persona non grata* because of his remark that the RS is a product of ethnic cleansing and crime, Tomac said: 'I stand behind this statement and I believe that the results of ethnic cleansing should be annulled. I have nothing against Dayton, entities that are multi-ethnic, a full equality of Serbs and their return to the places that they had to leave. However, I am demanding that the same rights are guaranteed to Croats and Bosniaks.'

Asked to comment on the information from "Bosniak press" that he stated that Croatia does not want to ratify the Agreement on Ploce Port, Tomac stated: 'I did not say that Croatia does not want to ratify the Agreement. I said that we have to change Article 9 which envisages the Steering Board with mixed composition and an IC representative who would pass decisions on all disputable issues. It is not serious to demand from the Croatian Parliament to ratify something, which is anti-constitutional in our opinion, and then to change it afterwards. If this Article remains it would mean that the IC representative would run Ploce Port and thus a part a protectorate from BiH would transfer to Croatia. It is

unbelievable to demand something like that from a sovereign state.'

Asked to comment that the Croats from West Herzegovina, who were against him ten years ago, are attacking him the least now, Tomac stated: The attacks are coming from the other sides, from those who do not like that new Croatian policy, which is not extreme, which is realistic, demands equality and unifies Croat(ian)s. In this way, they are losing a disturbing factor. They are losing Croats as scapegoats for all the things that do not function in BiH.'

Asked to comment on the information that Croats in BiH believe that Racan and Mesic, i.e. Croatia, completely gave up the Croats in BiH, Tomac stated: 'As far as Racan is concerned you are wrong. He has been attacked as well, but less than me. When we went to BiH two years ago we showed that we did not give up the Croats. Even at that time many people were against us because they wanted that the Croats were left on their own. We are being attacked because many people do not like that Croat(ian)s wage wise and democratic policy and that they are united, because they want to preserve the current situation, that is, the RS as ethnically cleansed state or the Federation in which the Croats have lost some rights that belong to them according to the Dayton Peace Agreement.'

Editorials

In Sunday's issue of *Oslobodjenje*, Zija Dizdarevic argues that the HDZ and SDS continue obstructing the talks on constitutional changes with their nationalist and secessionist aspirations. He notes that the HDZ insistence on full parity is absurd and is detrimental for what has been achieved thus far in the talks.

Dizdarevic writes that the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, is facing his final and most important exam in BiH.

“He simply has to put an end to this, because it is not only the quality and effect of his work that is on stake here, but the meaning of the International Community’s engagement in BiH,” Dizdarevic says, urging the IC to positively interfere in this process in order to avoid bringing BiH on the brink of chaos.

Almasa Bajric, in her column in Monday’s Dnevni Avaz also criticizes the HDZ, calling hypocritical its initiative to include the information on progress of talks on constitutional changes on the agenda of the BiH Parliament’s House of Representatives. Bajric notes that this House has no enforcement mechanisms to ensure the proper implementation of the CC ruling on constituent status, so including this information on its agenda would be absurd. In addition, she argues that only a few months ago the HDZ was advocating to so-called Croat self-rule, it is still interested in having a third entity for Croats in BiH, yet, it is most vocal about insisting on adequate constitutional changes. What is even greater irony, notes Bajric, is the fact that HDZ judges in the Constitutional Court voted against the ruling on constituent status of all peoples in BiH.

Headlines

Weekend editions

Glas srpski

- Momcilo Perisic arrested;
- RS Chamber of Commerce – Construction enterprises decertified;

Nezavisne novine

- Checkpoints set up on the Zvornik-Han Pijesak road – SFOR waited for ICTY indictees;
- Why did the FRY Army arrest Momcilo Perisic?

Dnevni Avaz

- Tomac: Croatia will not ratify Ploce port Agreement
- Federation Defense Minister: When will 10,000 soldiers be laid off

Oslobodjenje

- Delimustafic to be tried in Belgrade on march 26th
- SFOR sets up check point on the border with Serbia

Vecernji List

- Names of over 60 suspects for whose cases The Hague has authorized domestic courts: Most of bills of indictments refer to Serbs
- Two months after they were extradited to the USA: Algerian Group has been released

Vecernji List

- Exodus of Croats from Drvar has started: Thousands Croats on road
- Political crises in Serbia: General Perisic has been released from prison

Dnevni List

- Empire fights back: Embittered reaction of owner of 'Puma Security': 'Puma Security' was not blackmailing Herzegovinian tycoons!
- Embittered protest of Bosniak intellectuals: It is shame that bridge in Capljina was named after Dr. Franjo Tudjman
- Unusual leaflets in Ljubuski for the third time: Who rules, who should rule and who will rule after the elections?

Monday editions

Glas srpski

- The Vice Prime Minister of Government of Serbia released; Perisic: I am innocent
- Tihomir Stojanovic, lawyer: Immunity does not help

Nezavisne novine

- Dragan Mikerevic, newly appointed Chairman to the Council of Ministers

says for Nezavisne: I'll remain on Matic's and Lagumdzija's course

- Perisic case shaken Belgrade: charges against the Head of military intelligence today

Oslobodjenje

- Dangerous GSM antenna on Second Gymnasium

Dnevni Avaz

- Silajdzic warns: Those who committed genocide should not be rewarded

Dnevni List

- Final negotiations of the HR with HDZ representative: Petritsch threatened with arrests Lozancic, Ljubic and Colak
- (Un) expected turnabout: Mayor Neven Tomic withdrew resignation

Vecernji List

- Croats from BiH arrive to Gracac: We were expelled from Drvar
- Zdravko Tomac, the Vice President of the Croatian Parliament, fights back: We do not allow that protectorate transfers to Croatia