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Headlines

BiH State-related Issues

BIH becomes a full-fledged member of the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers decided on Wednesday to invite Bosnia and Herzegovina to join the Council of Europe as its 44th member State. The accession ceremony is scheduled to take place in Strasbourg on April 24, when BiH will officially become a full-fledged member of this oldest European human rights organisation. On the same day, during the session of the Parliamentary Assembly, BiH will be granted a right to vote. BiH media report that the decision on BiH membership to the CoE was made unanimously by 43 members of the CoE Committee of Ministers.

In a statement for the Federation Television, the BiH Foreign Minister, Zlatko Lagumdžija, said that a number of ministers in the Committee were inquiring about the implementation of the Constitutional Court's ruling

on constituency of peoples on all territory of BiH and offered their support in this important process. Lagumdzija expressed hope and confidence that solutions on constitutional changes in the entities will be made by the ruling political parties in BiH. "The more we make decisions on our own, the less we will have a need for the High Representative. Thought, I must say that Wolfgang Petritsch has been extremely helpful in this process and any agreement reached will also be his success," Lagumdzija told FTV.

Constitutional Reform

Talks on constitutional changes to resume today; OHR: BIH inches away from huge political breakthrough

The talks between representatives of eight ruling political parties in BiH on constitutional changes in the entities should resume today (Thursday) in the OHR building in Sarajevo. Although yesterday's meeting failed to produce concrete results, OHR spokesperson, Alexandra Stiglmeier said that "the basic shape and form of the necessary bodies and mechanisms for protection of vital national interests was agreed." "BiH may be only inches away from a major political breakthrough. If the leaders of your country, representatives of all its peoples and citizens and the two Entities, manage to agree on how the people and citizens will be represented and institutionally protected in the two Entities – this would mean that all those who have argued against your country, have been wrong," said Stiglmeier, adding that it is necessary to agree on how to make BiH multiethnic on its whole territory.

During the talks on Wednesday all political parties were represented. (All media in the Federation and RS quote Stiglmeier)

PIC Steering Board: Time has come for parties to reach closure on implementation of CC ruling

At a session held on Wednesday in Sarajevo, PIC Steering Board ambassadors noted that in the last ten days, there has been

genuine movement towards an agreement on constitutional changes in the entities and welcomed “the relentless efforts of the High Representative to facilitate a homegrown solution and commends those who have constructively contributed to the negotiations thus far.”

“It is the obligation of the political leaders of the country to reach agreement and implement the Constituent Peoples’ Decision. Narrow party interests need to be overcome and refusal to participate in these negotiations would be wholly unacceptable. Those calling for an imposition of constitutional changes are undermining the ongoing negotiation efforts and do not contribute to Bosnia and Herzegovina’s wider democratic development.” (Federation TV and BiH Radio 1 presented the full [communiqué](#) in prime time and late night news, Dnevni Avaz and news agencies also carried the full text, while other dailies, including Nezavisne Novine quoted excerpts)

SDA definitely withdraws from the talks on constitutional changes

Although all eight ruling political parties in BiH were represented during the discussion on Wednesday, the SDA Presidency concluded yesterday to fully withdraw from talks on constitutional changes in the entities. At a session held in Sarajevo, the SDA president, Sulejman Tihic, explained this decision by saying that his party cannot accept “solutions which would turn Bosniaks and Croats in the RS into national minorities and legitimize the ethnic cleansing”. We are inviting the High Representative to make the only right solution which would secure the same rights for Bosniaks and Croats in the RS, as are envisaged for Serbs in the Federation. On the contrary, BiH could become – Serb BiH,” warned Tihic. The SDA issued a statement for the press last night saying that the SDA deputy president, Adnan Terzic, will also be withdrawn from the talks. (Tihic’s statement received a great deal of coverage in all electronic and print media in

the Federation) ** See item below

SDA's Sulejman Tihic: Bosniaks will gain the least in these talks

In an interview with Dnevni Avaz, the president of the SDA, Sulejman Tihic, says that his withdrawal from the talks on constitutional changes in the entities does not, however, mean that the SDA will no longer participate in the discussion on this important issue. "SDA will remain represented in the talks, but at the level of the deputy president [Adnan Terzic]. I will not return until I receive guarantees by the High Representative that solutions will be symmetrical," Tihic said, adding that the working solutions offered two days ago were precisely asymmetrical.

Tihic said that, during the talks, the High Representative has been acting as a neutral observer, who directs the conversation, proposes suggestions, but does not reveal his position. "His main problems were Croat and Serb sides, and he was concerned that they might get upset. At the end, they will be the ones that are pleased, while Bosniaks will gain the least in these talks."

Tihic explained that according to some proposed solutions, Serbs would remain dominant in the RS, and gain one third in the Federation. "They would succeed in what they failed to achieve in the war – they got the Serb BiH!," Tihic explained.

NOTE: It is still not clear whether the SDA will be represented during today's talks.

OHR condemns the behavior of the SDA

In a statement for the FTV, OHR spokesperson, Alexandra Stiglmeier, strongly condemned the behavior of SDA president, Sulejman Tihic, and his decision to fully withdraw the party from the talks on constitutional changes in the entities. "Instead of taking an active part in making of his historic

decision which should secure full rights of all peoples on the entire territory of BiH, the SDA is more interested in advancing its party interests," said Stiglmayer.

"SDA as a Bosniak political party is responsible for securing a better position for the people it represents in the course of the talks. This is a catastrophic move by the SDA," OHR'S Oleg Milisic told Oslobodjenje.

PDP's Mladen Ivanic: Entity to introduce council for protection of national interests

RS Prime Minister Mladen Ivanic has said that it was agreed on Tuesday at the meeting of the main Bosnian parties with High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch that the BiH Federation should keep the House of Peoples while the RS should introduce a council for protection of national interests which would convene only when requested so by representatives of any national group and which would have a very limited scope of action. Ivanic told SRNA at Banja Luka Airport, before his departure for Sarajevo, that they will discuss at the meeting with the High Representative the future government structure and other posts, especially with regard to how well represented all national groups would be. "I am not a pessimist and I believe that the RS team has had a correct and unified performance at the talks. In these two, three days we have withstood some attacks which were thoroughly unprincipled and which demanded that RS introduce the rotation of the RS prime minister and president – to include representatives of other national groups – something which we find unacceptable", Ivanic said. The prime minister said that as far as the RS is concerned progress had been made and that the RS had demonstrated again that it was "ready to compromise and that it will not lose its identity". Ivanic, who is also the chairman of the Party of Democratic Progress, said he believed that the talks in Sarajevo "are of greater importance than the public has been told". "These talks have been basically a battle which has been being waged for establishing a new order

in BiH and securing the survival of the RS which could withstand the international community's test," Ivanic said, adding that he was encouraged by a high degree of unity, maturity and responsibility demonstrated by the RS parties "which have demonstrated their readiness to compromise, but also firmness not to do so beyond certain limits".

Milorad Dodik over constitutional changes

The President of the RS Party of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), Milorad Dodik addressed a letter to the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch , in which he informs him that he could not attend the negotiations over constitutional changes. In his letter, Dodik emphasized that he left negotiations on Monday when he realized that there was no honesty and that some participants of the talks, were using every opportunity for their party promotion and to impose some solutions that were not acceptable to all three nations. The SNSD President emphasized that he appreciated efforts of the High Representative to let local politicians to find decision on how to implement the Constitutional Court decision and show that they were responsible and trustworthy. Dodik added that he was dissatisfied over the lack of will to reach compromise.

Milorad Dodik to return to the talks?

Fena news agency quotes Party of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) President and former RS prime minister, Milorad Dodik, as saying in Laktasi today that he will return to the talks on constitutional changes if the overall climate at the talks improves. He said that the talks on constitutional changes are as important as those held in Dayton. "We have to negotiate and reach a compromise, but we also have to establish the parliamentary decision making process", said Dodik. He said he believed that based on "good proposals presented by the Serb representatives during the talks it is possible to adopt amendments to the RS Constitution". "We are ready to offer this document to the Council of Europe and the Venetian

Commission so that they can say whether this document contains any discriminatory elements", said Dodik.

Croatian press on talks in Sarajevo and constitutional changes in the entities

Vjesnik reports that, despite progress, the High Representative might have the final say in the negotiations on the constitutional changes. According to the daily, this may happen after his consultations with the Peace Implementation Council and before his departure from BiH. *Vjesnik* also quotes Mariofil Ljubic from HDZ as saying that if there were no effective instruments of protection, then it is possible to pass all decisions against the will of the Croat people. "This is not acceptable for us," Ljubic said. *Vjesnik* also notes that Petritsch's 'compromise solutions' are not acceptable for the Croats in BiH. They lead BiH towards the state with two entities and two peoples. Ljubic stressed that no Croat politician in BiH will sign such solutions and if the situation remains unchanged after another round of talks, Petritsch will once again use his 'extended powers' and impose the solution.

Vecernji List reads that representatives of Serb parties from the RS have again tried to bring the talks back to square one when they sought to transfer some important issues of the vital national interests to the competence of the RS Assembly. VL also says that the High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch offered Croats a 15% participation in the RS Government which was resolutely rejected by Croat representatives calling it an offensive proposal. The daily quotes an HDZ negotiator Mariofil Ljubic as saying that the Croat negotiators have come to the meeting with very strong nerves and harmonized stances which will not be given up. "We have finally learned that negotiations should not be abandoned", said Ljubic adding that there is a hope as long as the talks are ongoing. Ljubic said that the sides are negotiating about solutions for the entities, whether it would be a House or a Council of Peoples

adding that the Croat side is of an opinion that in any case such body should be able to decide on all vital national interests. NHI leader Kresimir Zubak also thinks that one should not “snap” now when the talks have entered the final phase. Zubak says that problems sometimes occur over one word which brings talks to the verge of interruption adding that it is hard to make prognosis. Zubak has a feeling that the sides are bringing their positions closer. On the other hand, reads VL, Ilija Simic of the HSS is not that optimistic saying that it is clear to him that an agreement will not be reached. Simic says that he learned from talks with Croat negotiators that the solutions which are being offered cannot and will not be accepted by the Croats. Simic says that the Federation Parliament will not be able to adopt asymmetric solutions because the Croats will not accept them and that on the other hand, the Serbs will not agree to establishment of a HoP in the RS which, in Simic’s opinion, will not be imposed by the HR. HSS leader believes that Petritsch has not the courage to take one last decision before he leaves adding that Croats and Bosniaks share almost identical position and that they would not allow any solutions to be made without their consent.

Oslobodjenje: Asymmetry not in line with European standards

In a column in today’s Oslobodjenje, Zija Dizdarevic argues that the situation in BiH has been brought to an utter absurdity, as this must be the only country where political parties are discussing whether to implement or not a decision by the Constitutional Court. Inevitably, Dizdarevic writes, this discussion could only produce asymmetric constitutional solutions the two BiH entities which would not be in line with basic European standards of democracy.

Federation

Ante Jelavic: Croats will have the right to demand a Croat Federal unit if the RS remain ethnically clean

Ante Jelavic stated in an interview with Zagreb's Vjesnik that in the case that the RS remains ethnically clean state of the Serb people, the Croats will have a full legitimacy to demand and establish the Croat Federal unit. Jelavic added that the Croats are not concerned about the problems regarding their registration and the people, who were penalized by the High Representative, will remain in politics even if they end up in prison. Jelavic said that Niko Lozancic would most probably be registered in the Mostar Cantonal Court as the representative of HDZ.

OHR regrets the resignation of Bosniak ministers in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton

The OHR in Mostar regrets that Bosniak officials in the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton Government on Tuesday decided to resign and believes this was a brave decision, which does not however mean that it supports it, OHR Spokesperson Avis Benes told reporters on Wednesday in Mostar, and report nearly all media in the Federation.

Because of the payment of one salary in part of the canton with the Croat majority, the Bosniak ministers in the cantonal government resigned. In an explanation sent to the president of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton and his deputy, they said they resign because the mentioned one-sided payment of salary and stressed that this kind of payment means that two canton have been functioning.

Benes said that according to the law, the minister and his deputy make the decisions on all important issues, including the payment of salaries. "This means that there must be two signatures before the salaries are paid out," Benes said, adding that issuing of documents with only one signature violates the procedure.

Party for BiH collects signatures for Silajdzic's candidacy for the BiH Presidency

Oslobodjenje reports that the Party for BiH started collecting signatures for the candidacy of its founder Haris Silajdzic to the post of the Bosniak member of the BiH Presidency. Party leadership could not confirm this, however, the daily writes that Silajdzic's return to politics is imminent.

Lovre Pejkovic, Croatian Head of the Administration for Displaced Persons and Refugees and Assistant of the Minister for Public Works, Reconstruction and Construction: There is something wrong in BiH if refugees' wave cannot be stopped from there

(provided by OHR Mostar)

Pejkovic stated: 'Croatia wants to stop the refugees' wave from BiH and at the moment Croatia is doing it through numerous diplomatic activities. Our initiative is that the problems of evicted Croats have to be solved in BiH, or concretely in Drvar, in the agreement with the Drvar Authorities.'

Pejkovic stressed that Croatia does not want to involve in legislation of another state and added that Zagreb does not bring in question legality of the evictions but it deals with its consequences and added: 'If the refugees' wave does not stop, it means that something is wrong in a neighboring state.'

Pejkovic stressed that they will do everything that these people remain in BiH and Croatia will do everything to protect their civic and human rights which, are now obviously endangered. Pejkovic said: 'We are not suspicious about legality of BiH Laws, however, something that is legal is not always human.' Pejkovic wonders as to how these people will live when the laws are being applied without taking into consideration the situation of each of the families, the alternative accommodation is not being offered to them etc. The article concludes that Pejkovic poses

these questions indirectly sending the message to the International Community and BiH Authorities 'which by applying the strict rules discriminate evicted Croats and make them go to Croatia'.

Vecernji List brings on the same issue the appeal of the Canton 10 Government addressed to Croat refugees calling on them stay in Drvar. The Government has asked the Head of the Municipality and OHR to solve issues of land plots for individual house building. The Government will provide temporary accommodation for refugees in the premises of former ZAP building and rearrange some capacities in the local ambulance.

Republika Srpska

Paris Le Monde claims that Karadzic is in Montenegro

Relying on diplomatic and military sources, Paris *Le Monde* claims that, after unsuccessful SFOR attempt to arrest him, former RS President, Radovan Karadzic, indicted by ICTY, found refuge in Montenegro mountains, out of reach of SFOR troops. *Le Monde* quotes an intelligence officer as saying: "From time to time, Karadzic lived in the area of Celebici. Montenegrin border is only one kilometer far. And not only that he was informed on SFOR plans, he had some of his securities waiting on the other side of the border." Recalling that France, US and NATO rejected claims of British and German media that one French officer was responsible for the failure of SFOR recent attempts to arrest Karadzic, *Le Monde* mentions few more version of the event. One of them is an information being spread amongst SFOR officers and that is that US commandos reacted too slowly, while the other implies manipulation of Karadzic's security.

ICTY Chief Prosecutor to visit Belgrade in April

The ICTY Chief Prosecutor, Carla del Ponte is to visit Belgrade on 8th April and meet with representatives of FRY and Serbia. Del Ponte stated: "All issues will be discussed openly. Current situation has to change, their obstruction of the cooperation with the Tribunal has to stop."

According to Del Ponte, one of the topics to be discussed at the Belgrade meeting will be the ongoing investigation over the responsibility of Albanian side for crimes against Serb population in Kosovo.

Mandate of the RS Public Prosecutor expired

In a statement to Nezavisne novine, the RS Public Prosecutor, Vojislav Dimitrijevic stated that, due to the fact that his four years mandate expired, and that his successor was not elected, duties of the RS Public Prosecutor will be carried out by Jovan Spajic. According to Dimitrijevic, a public competition for election of new Public Prosecutor was opened but until Tuesday, nobody applied.

International Community

De-mining Board of Donors hold first session in Sarajevo

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, attended on Wednesday in the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo, the first meeting of the De-mining Board of Donors since the adoption of the De-mining Law by the BiH Parliament last month. The BiH Presidency Chairman, Beriz Belkic, the BiH Minister of Civil Affairs and Communications, Svetozar Mihajlovic and representatives of the BiH De-Mining Commission were also present at the meeting.

This meeting heralds a new approach to de-mining in BiH. The State-level de-mining legislation has, for the first time, put de-mining in BiH under a formal legal framework, creating the necessary government structure to administer, manage and control de-mining activities in BiH under the Ministry of Civil Affairs and Communication's De-mining Commission and the BiH Mine Action Centre, said OHR in a [statement](#) .

(This item was well reported in the press and electronic media in the Federation)

Paddy Ashdown in Paris: Ashdown and Vedrine to talk about BiH

The French Foreign Minister, Hubert Vedrine, will today in Paris receive the future High Representative in BiH, Paddy Ashdown. The two officials are to discuss the present situation in BiH and the further military engagement of French troops within SFOR.

Editorials

Oslobodjenje: Lost in the Swamp

By Gojko Beric

In a lengthy editorial in Oslobodjenje, Gojko Beric argues that the democratic consciousness in BiH is on such a low level that nearly any attempt to reach a compromise on any issue ends in a fight or as an imposed solution by the High Representative. Although Wolfgang Petritsch keeps insisting on a compromise and keeps stressing that a compromise is a basic postulate of democracy, it is more than clear that democracy is not yet ripe in BiH.

Beric writes that Petritsch's optimism about the outcome of the talks is surprising, as his prior experience (e.g., flag, coat of arms, passports, etc.) with BiH politicians should have taught him otherwise.

"By criticizing the HDZ and SDS, one is thereby dismissing this very understanding of democracy. Wolfgang Petritsch himself does not know how to get out of that viscious circle. Upon his arrival in Sarajevo, Viennese diplomat stepped into Balkan mud wearing a paten leather shoes. And he should have known that in places where population has not yet developed democratic consciousness, there can be no democracy. In such cases, all political discussions, including the one on constitutional changes, turn into a fight.

Dnevni List: Bosniaks advocate pulling down of the RS only verbally!

(provided by OHR Mostar)

By Ivica Glibusic

Writing about the constitutional changes, Glibusic says that during the talks it has become obvious that Bosniaks have given up the idea to pull down the RS and their demands to introduce the House of Peoples in the RS are of a declarative nature only. Glibusic concludes: 'When we are aware of this, harsh attacks of Serbs on Croat negotiators are much more clear to us.'

Vecernji List: What language is Paddy Ashdown learning (Provided by OHR Mostar)

By Jago Musa

VL carries an editorial in which the author Jago Musa criticizes the Bosniak printed media for saying that the new High Representative in BiH Paddy Ashdown and his advisor are "taking courses in Bosnian language". Musa asks why it is not the Serb or Croat language which are both recognized in the BiH Constitution ironically saying that Ashdown probably has not gone through the preamble of the Constitution. The author says that such practice has become normal in BiH with other organizations, both domestic and foreign ones, and goes on to render the issue of the Bosniak/Bosnian language which is a subject of many discussions. Musa says that the issue of titles of languages in BiH should be included in the talks on the constitutional changes.

Vecernji List: Serbs are not ready for Dom

(**NB:** Dom is a House in Croat(ian) but also a word which had been used by Ustashas in WWII when saluting) *(Provided by OHR Mostar)*

By Zdenko Cosic

This editorial begins with an observation that all political leaders have made their political somersault after Constitutional Court's decision on

constituency of peoples in whole BiH, including Croat politicians who, at the beginning, have been afraid of losing sovereignty in Federation, and later they saw extension of their sovereignty to the other entity. The author says that the role of international community in this process is to blame Croats for extremism, both when they were against the Court's decision or today that they are for its implementation. After saying that Serbs are openly saying that it is a foolish thing to expect the House of Peoples in RS and that Bosniaks are not so much supporting the idea of equality on the whole territory of BiH, Cosic states that international community wishes to preserve at least the skeleton of the Dayton Accord. They, as the authors and sponsors of that project, are paying more attention to their ego rather than to logic.

Headlines

Glas srpski

- Over terrorist threats: Americans closed their door
- Tihic angry with Petritsch

Nezavisne novine

- Ministers Committee of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg: BiH Formally in Europe

Dnevni List

- Ivica Primorac, former Head of SIS (Croat intelligence service) responds to media accusations: I did not lay information against Tuta, Klica, Rojs and Jelavic to The Hague
- Talks on constitutional changes in BiH in dead alley: Petritsch makes negotiators go insane to impose solutions

Vecernji List

- Talks on constitutional changes: Republic of Srpska without House of Peoples after all
- Exodus from Drvar: Local Government calls on for stay

Oslobodjenje

- BiH full-fledged member of the Council of Europe

Dnevni Avaz

- Confirmed accession to the Council of Europe