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BiH State-related Issues

BiH Foreign minister hails BiH accession to Council of Europe

All obstacles for BiH's full membership of the Council of Europe have been removed following Wednesday's decision of the Committee of Ministers of this organisation, BiH Foreign Minister Zlatko Lagumdžija said upon his return from Strasbourg on Thursday. He told a news conference in Sarajevo that Europe in this way offered BiH another chance to become integrated into Europe and to bring its standards up to the European levels.

Lagumdžija believes that at the same time this is a clear message to representatives of political parties and the international community, who are making decisions about constitutional changes in BiH, that modern Europe does not recognise constitutional solutions which are contrary to the European convention on human rights and liberties. He also said that BiH's membership in the Council of Europe is also a confirmation of its statehood and its place in Europe as a country with democratic prospects. "This decision puts a stop to all speculation regarding BiH made over the past 10 years, when the issue of its state borders was frequently raised," Lagumdžija stressed. (All Federation media carry this reports from Lagumdžija's press conference in Sarajevo)

OHR welcomes the BiH accession to the Council of Europe

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch praised on

Thursday the Council of Europe's decision to admit BiH as its 44th member. "Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the Council of Europe will cement the country's European perspective, and this is where its future lies," said yesterday Patrik Volf, an OHR spokesman. Volf added that the membership in this European human right organization should also serve as a "powerful stimulus" to BiH political leaders to "show real statesmanship and reach an agreement on constitutional changes in the entities." "The amendment of the Entity Constitutions is the most serious challenge that Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders have faced since Dayton – a challenge that, once met, will catapult Bosnia and Herzegovina far forward on its way to Europe," stressed Volf during the press conference.

BiH football clubs unite for first time since war

At a press conference held in the offices of the BiH Football Association on Thursday, the president of the World Football Federation [FIFA], Joseph Blatter, announced that all football clubs and associations in BiH have agreed to play together in the forthcoming football season and that all the dilemmas about this issue will be sorted out by May when the general assembly convenes. Blatter said that the unity within the BiH Football Association can only boost the credibility of BiH's application to stage the European Cup in 2008 together with Croatia. "All this is leading in the same direction, the direction of peace and reconciliation. As FIFA chairman, I cannot directly intervene but I can help the BiH and Croatian candidacy. I can tell you that your candidacy has a lot of sympathisers in FIFA. It carries moral weight as it is presented within a humanist framework," Blatter said.

Constitutional Reform

Talks on constitutional changes entering the final stage

Leaders of eight political parties in BiH and the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, will resume on Monday their talks on constitutional changes in the entities. Federation media noted late last night that significant progress has been made and that participants agreed on the establishment of a body in the RS which would provide mechanisms for the protection of vital national interests of peoples. Speaking live for the FTV prime time news last night, the High Representative said that political leaders need to find courage to make the final compromise. He explained that this is not a compromise on the Constitutional Court's ruling on constituency of peoples, but a compromise on *how* to best implement the ruling. "The International Community wants to see a home-grown solutions. The politicians you have elected need to find this solution," said Petritsch, adding that this BiH is in the "age of *odgovornost*" (ownership of the peace process by local politicians) and that this principle needs to be demonstrated in practice.

Petritsch also strongly criticised the SDA from walking away from the talks on constitutional changes. "The party does not seem to be interested in a solution and compromise that would establish equality of BiH peoples and citizens throughout BiH and strengthen the state. They are more interested in party politics at a detriment of the future of this country," he said, stressing that he could not accept the party's obvious insistence on keeping the status quo. "I want progress," Petritsch said for FTV.

Also speaking live for the FTV, however somewhat later in the evening, the BIH Foreign Minister, Zlatko Lagumdžija, stressed that there has been a significant progress in the talks, but he could not tell if the discussion entered the final stage. "As the High Representative stressed earlier, we have agreed on some 80%, however the remaining 20% will require 80% of our

energy in order to be resolved," said Lagumdžija, refusing to provide any concrete details of the last night's discussion.

Banja Luka press on talks on constitutional changes

Both Banja Luka dailies report on the continuation of the talks over constitutional changes. The SDS President and Speaker of the RS National Assembly (NA), Dragan Kalinic expressed expectations that talks would be concluded. He also announced that a session of the RS NA might be held some time next week. Nezavisne novine quote HDZ representative, Mariofil Ljubic as saying that a proposal according to which constitutive peoples should have 15 % representation in power in the RS was absolutely unacceptable. He emphasized that such a solution would not be symmetrical, compared to the Federation and added that 20% was the minimum for participation in power. According to Ljubic, that was one of the disputable issues. RS Prime Minister, Mladen Ivanic stated that some parties which participate in the negotiations do not have enough strength to accept solutions that are realistic and possible. President of the New Croatian Initiative (NHI) Kresimir Zubak, stated after the latest round of talks that he was skeptical on the possibility that representatives of political parties might reach final agreement and that the international community would have to decide on some disputable issues. Nezavisne novine has learnt from the sources close to Serb representatives that Kresimir Zubak, SDP and Party for BiH were obstructing the talks. SDA withdraw from the talks and OHR assessed that move as irresponsible.

SNSD's Milorad Dodik returned to negotiations over constitutional changes

The leader of the RS Party of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) Milorad Dodik stated for Nezavisne novine that he decided to return to the negotiations over constitutional changes due to the fact that he wanted to see a solution

reached. "I will try to present constructive proposals and see if it is possible. If that does not work, I see no reason why should we all waste our days in all this." – said Dodik. He added that he did not leave the negotiations to weaken RS negotiating position but in order to draw attention to unbearable returning to the beginning of talks, thanks to the radical attitudes of Bosniac and Croat representatives.

SDP dissatisfied with offered constitutional solutions

During yesterday's meeting, senior officials in the SDP informed the party president, Zlatko Lagumdžija, that the SDP finds unacceptable the constitutional solutions presented during the meeting of eight political parties on Wednesday. "We still insist on symmetric solutions in terms of defining the vital national interests and mechanisms for their protection, as well as the representation in the executive authority and judiciary," an anonymous SDP source told Dnevni Avaz, explaining that solutions reached on Wednesday were not in line with SDP's position.

Party for BiH submits Memorandum on Constitutional Changes to the High Representative

Immediately prior to Thursday's meeting between representatives of eight political parties and the High Representative, Safet Halilovic of the Party for BiH, submitted to Wolfgang Petritsch a Memorandum on Constitutional Changes drafted by this party. "This is an official documents which spells out the principles which will not be abandoned by the Party for BiH," Halilovic told Dnevni Avaz. He said that that satisfactory constitutional changes must include a parity-based House of Peoples in the Federation and the parity-based Council of Peoples in the RS, as legislative institutions which will ensure efficient protection of vital national interests in process of passing laws and other decisions, parity and rotation at the posts of entity

presidents and vice presidents, as well as parity in structure of constitutional and supreme courts in the entities. In addition, Halilovic explained, representation in the executive authority must be based on the 1991 population census. "If political talks and constitutional commissions fail to reach a consensus on these issues, we expect the High Representative to resolve disputed issues," said Halilovic.

BiH Croat party leaders demand equal rights for all

Oslobodjenje reports that the leaders of Croat parties in BiH will demand from the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, and the Peace Implementation Council to secure the minimum guaranteed right for all peoples in BiH. The daily writes that this minimum includes the establishment of the House of Peoples in the RS National Assembly as well as the distribution of power in executive authority on the basis of the 1991 population census. At a recent meeting with the Catholic Cardinal Vinko Puljic, representatives of Croat parties agreed to draft a document on joint demands which would be presented to all parties with Croat prefix in BiH.

Croatian press on Croat party requests: Same rights and mechanisms of protection of national interests in both entities

Commenting on the negotiations on constitutional changes, Vecernji List reports that Croat politicians used yesterday's break in talks in the OHR to draft a memorandum that is to define joint stands of Croat parties on this issue. Kresimir Zubak, the President of NHI, and Ilija Simic, the President of HSS, were in charge of it. According to unofficial version of the memorandum, it was concluded that as long as there is a current, unnatural and unjust form of the internal administrative-territorial organization of BiH, Croat political representatives have an obligation to demand full constitutional-legal guarantees and instruments for the

protection of their vital national interests, rights and needs in both entities equally. They also concluded that the current volume of the Croat national rights and instruments of their protection, which has been defined according to the Federation Constitution, is at the lowest level and its further reduction is not acceptable. The working version of the memorandum, drafted by Ilija Simic, says that the Croat people demand to have the same rights and mechanisms for the protection of these rights in the RS as in the BiH Federation. The memorandum does not say anywhere that there is a need for the existence of Houses of Peoples, but it has been only insisted on the symmetry of the solutions. The article says that such stands of the Croat political parties, that is, non-insisting on the establishment of the House of Peoples in the RS, could only partially satisfy the HR, who succumbed to the requests of Serb parties not to establish this body. However, demands for identical bodies and mechanisms of protection of national interests, that the Croat parties insist on, can be a new obstacle in the negotiations.

Yesterday morning the OHR Spokesperson, Mario Brkic, stated that the negotiations of political representatives on Wednesday ended with technical issues.

'The basic form and the forms of necessary bodies, as well as, the mechanisms have been agreed. Participants of the meeting are talking about the numbers pertaining to representation, number of positions, distribution of key positions, and about where the simple and the two-thirds majority are required,' said Brkic.

He reminded of the positions of the PIC Steering Board, which is of the opinion that structurally identical solutions are not possible.

'Symmetry essentially means that the rights and vital national interests will be guaranteed for all three constituent peoples in BiH. When talking about that guarantee you can be sure that

the symmetry will exist in that sphere, ' says Brkic.

Vjesnik carries on the same issue that Zlatko Lagumdžija, a Head of the BiH Diplomacy, says that, in his opinion, Petritsch 'is a guardian of European values in BiH and if we start to go out of European standards, while searching for solutions, Petritsch is obliged to bring us back.' Vjesnik also says: 'Many analysts of the current events have commented on this statement as a confirmation that Petritsch will simply 'impose the rest, that is, 20% of the decision' (for which OHR Spokesperson Alexandra Stiglmayer said to be only finesses, although she admits that they negotiate severely in which way national interests will be protected?!) perhaps with a help of Venetian Commission whose help was offered in Strasbourg.

Catholic Bishops' Conference urges leaders to consistently implement the CC ruling

Catholic press agency, KTA, reports that the Catholic Bishops' Conference has asked political leaders participating in the talks on constitutional changes in the entities to insist on the consistent implementation of the Constitutional Court's ruling on constituency of people on the whole territory of BiH. Following last night's meeting with representatives of Croat parties in BiH, Bishops expressed their concern about the manner in which the talks are being conducted and the direction of the ongoing discussion. "We will not accept any solutions which will bring Croats in BiH to the status of national minority," said the statement issued by the Bishops' Conference.

Federation

Picula and Klein talked about "exodus" from Drvar: Croats must stay in BiH

Slobodna Dalmacija reports that the Croatian Foreign Minister

Tonino Picula met with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General Jacques-Paul Klein yesterday to discuss, among other things, the issue of refugee crisis in Drvar. Picula also informed Klein about his visit to Knin when he learned about the problems directly on the ground. Picula and Klein agreed that a solution which would enable Croats to stay in Drvar should be reached and that it is necessary to calm the situation down.

Republika Srpska

Privatization of disputed apartments still uncertain: Petritsch did not lift the freeze

Glas srpski has learnt from the RS Ministry for Urbanism that the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch did not lift the freeze on privatization of around 15,000 apartments that are disputable. Even though it was announced that he would do so as soon as an Instruction on check up of returned contracts is publicized in the RS Official Gazette, he did not. Another thing is also uncertain: whether the OHR would respect an agreement with the Ministry for Urbanism, according to which group of apartments where a tenancy right holder passed away after 19th December 1998. and contracts that were revalidated because of fact that some companies left the housing funds, would be excluded from the control. Even though, the Instruction was Gazzeted 15 days ago, joint commissions comprised of OMI representatives and representatives of municipal housing authorities, have not been formed yet. According to the Spokesman of the RS Ministry for Refugees and DPs, Vojin Mijatovic, the establishment of the commissions will begin next week. Nezavisne novine quote Assistant to the RS Minister of Urbanism, Miladin Gacanovic as saying that the High Representative would lift the ban any day now.

Public debate on RTRS Law

Both Banja Luka dailies report on yesterday's public debate over RTRS law, organized by the RS Government. The discussion focused on collection of the subscription, composition of the Board of Governors, appointment of leading officials and whether the RTRS needed a founder. The RS Minister of Traffic and Communication, Branko Dokic expressed an opinion that an idea according to which the RTRS should have a manager and two editors was not bad, but also, that former officials cannot be appointed for the Board of Governors. An SDS deputy to the RS National Assembly, Borislav Paravac stated that the Board of Governors should answer to the Government and RS National Assembly. The RTRS Director, Jelena Davidovic stated that subscription was an obligation of the citizens.

International Community

US Embassy in Sarajevo closes, Police arrests one suspect

All media reported that US embassy in Sarajevo and its consulate in Banja Luka were closed for public on Thursday due to a credible threat to security of its staff. Federation TV and Oslobodjenje write that the Federation Police arrested yesterday one person suspected of planning an attack on the embassy in Sarajevo, however, the Ministry of Interior refused to officially confirm this information.

PDHR Donald Hays visits Tuzla Canton to discuss refugee issues

Principal Deputy High Representative Donald Hays visited on Thursday the Tuzla Canton and met with cantonal officials on the issues of refugees return and property laws implementation. It was agreed that an international local group is founded to approach resolving of the issues of

refugees and displaced persons. Hays and local authorities also considered the reform of judiciary and economy.

Editorials

Vecernji List: Hope (provided by OHR Mostar)

By Stjepan Kovac

This editorial begins by reminding of Wolfgang Petritsch's words that he expects domestic politicians to show their ability to run this country by adopting the constitutional changes agreement. However, the author says that the politicians will not be able to agree on constitutional changes more than prewar Presidents of Republics of former Yugoslavia in 1991. He adds that the agreement on constitutional changes would not only be about harmonizing of two entity constitutions to the one at the state level, but also about changing the essence of internal structure of BiH and relations among the three constituent peoples. The conclusion in this editorial says that if there is no readiness and determinant attitude to impose just and ethical solutions, which was not the case in Dayton, BiH will remain divided, with good chances for disaster in economy and general stability.

Headlines

Glas srpski

- Privatization of disputed apartments still uncertain: Petritsch did not lift the freeze
- Aggravated presence of SFOR in Herzegovina: Hunt or an exercise

Nezavisne novine

- European Union donated 135 vehicles to State Border Service: Assistance to BiH worth 2,8 million Euro
- Talks over constitutional changes continued in OHR: Dodik returned to negotiations

Vecernji List

- Due to fear of terrorists USA offices in BiH closed: Americans are expecting attacks
- Croat parties at the eve of continuation of negotiations on constitutional changes: Same solutions in both entities

Oslobodjenje

- Bosnian arrested for threatening US Embassy

Dnevni Avaz

- What Party for BiH and SDP are asking for?

Jutarnje Novine

- New unsealed indictments