BiH Media Round-up, 6/12/2001

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BiH State-related Issues

BiH Prime Minister visiting Austria: Austria promises to help development business sector in BiH

During his two-day visit to Austria, the chairman of the BiH Council of Ministers and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zlatko Lagumdzija, met with the country's president, Thomas Klestil, the chancellor, Wolfgang Schuessel, and his Austrian counterpart, Benita Ferrero-Waldner. In a statement for the press, the BiH Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that two delegations discussed the bilateral relations between BiH and Austria, and Austrian support to the development of business sector in BiH, in particular of small and medium companies. In talks with Austrian leaders, Lagumdzija also called upon representatives of large Austrian companies to consider the possibility of participation in the privatization process in BiH and investments into the country's business sector.

Double citizenship BiH-Croatia: Most of Croats to be stripped of right to vote in Croatia

Double Citizenship Accord between BiH and Croatia will be one of the important subjects of discussion at the session of the Inter-State Council of BiH and Croatia, scheduled for 11

December in Zagreb, and the signing of the accord will depend on Croatia's stand.

BiH will not be preventing its citizens from attaining Croatian or Yugoslav citizenship as well if agreements allowing it are made with those countries.

A person who has double citizenship would do the army service and pay taxes only in his/her country of residence, and that would also be the only country where he/she would have the right to vote, says Slobodna Dalmacija.

Returnees entitled to receive medical treatment in places of return

All media in BiH report that, as of January 2002, the returnees will be entitled to health care services in the returnee area, regardless of the BiH Entity the area belongs to.

The Agreement regulating the issue of health care protection was concluded on Wednesday in Sarajevo between the BiH Federation, the Republika Srpska and the Brcko District by representatives of the BiH Council of Ministers, governments of the two Entities and the Brcko District. Under this Agreement, returnees from the Federation to the RS or the Brcko District will be entitled to health care services and the medicines under the legislation currently in force in the RS or the District.

Every citizen will be entitled to hospitalization and medical services whose value exceeds KM 300, as well as to receive orthopaedic aids and other mobility equipment in the other Entity. This, however, would require either instruction or approval of the relevant health insurance institution in the home Entity or the District.

Federation

Hercegovina-Neretva Canton Interior Minister dismisses chief of Police in Stolac

Federation Television reported last night that the Minister of Interior in the Hercegovina-Neretva Canton, Goran Bilic, dismissed the acting chief of police administration in Stolac, Davor Vidovic, and his deputy, Smajo Cerkez, because of their failure to effectively deal with the recent incidents in this town. In a statement for the press, the Ministry explained that the immediate cause of the dismissal was worsening situation in Stolac. Oslobodjenje reports that minor incident tool place late Tuesday night, when a group of about 200 Croats gathered in front to of the police station in this town demanding the release of two Croats formerly detained because of the incidents on Sunday. They, according to the daily, threatened to "burn everything that is Bosniak in Stolac," if they demands are not met. As a group of about 100 Bosniaks also gathered close by, the situation in the area became extremely tense. Dnevni List reports that several Bosniaks walked into the Stolac high school with bats in their hands, while Vecernji List writes about "Bosniak extremists" who were openly threatening to Croats.

"This will be a true test for the new Minister of Interior in Hercegovina-Neretva Canton," said Colin Munro, head of the OHR South, commenting on the incidents in Stolac. Media report that the situation in this town is presently somewhat calmer.

Veterans Associations to protest in front of the OHR Sarajevo if the Human Rights Chamber rules in favor of return of apartments to former JNA officers

Leaders of Veterans associations in the Federation announced

on Wednesday that they will organize protests in front of the OHR and CRPC offices in Sarajevo if the BiH Human Rights Chamber rules this week in favor of return of abandoned apartments to former JNA (Yugoslav National Army) officers. During yesterday's shorter gathering in front of the OHR, Ahmo Kadric, the president of the Association of Paraplegic Veterans in the Federation, said that if the Human Rights Chamber rules in favor of the former officers and thereby overturns the decision of the High Representative, "he should pack his bags and leave BiH." Bahrija Kitusa of the Sarajevo Canton Veterans' Families association said that families of fallen soldiers are ready to cause a major unrest in the country and block all institutions and traffic in BiH. "Veterans and their families will block the return of apartments with their own bodies," she said. Both Kadric and Kitusa stressed that they will wait forth final ruling of the Human Rights Chamber and then decide on the future steps.

Croatian media speculate about possibility denying the re-registration of HDZ as political party

Dnevni List followed up on the story about the court registration of the HDZ and tried to interview Ante Jelavic's Media Advisor Tihomir Begic and the HDZ Secretary General Josip Merdzo, but neither of them were willing to talk about the matter. Finally, a senior party official who wanted to remain anonymous, told the paper that the possibility of denying the court registration cannot be ruled out.

Vecernji List, on the other hand, quotes another senior official of the HDZ as saying that Jelavic and his party colleagues who were dismissed by the High Representative will resign if this is the condition for the re-registration of the party. In that case, the HDZ would hold another congress in order to elect a new leadership. The daily also speculates that the HDZ will not, from now on, run in the elections independently, but in coalition with the other member parties of the HNS.

HDZ: Petritsch's decisions are contrary to Human Rights Conventions

The letter was sent in order to warn once again of too vast powers vested into the HR in BiH, while at the same time he is not held responsible at all. The letter says: 'At the moment when there is an obvious danger for the Croats, who are the people smallest in a number, to lose their own constituency, their political importance and their own identity, we dare to offer you our ideas about a possible standardization of collective and individual human rights and freedoms, as well as, a possible framework for a self-sustainable BiH. By a minimum revision of the Dayton Peace Agreement these solutions are possible and at last they would take us towards a just and self-sustainable solution of the BiH political crises. It is not easy to resolve this crises either by a current slow pace of the constitutional changes or by the proposals on the establishment of Constitutional-Legal Commissions, that do not secure a minimal implementation of the Constitutional Court decision on the constituency of the peoples on the whole BiH territory. At last we are free to propose you to encourage the HR to reconsider his decisions on the removal of the officials once again, the decisions that have endangered a private property and slowed down the development of the free market in BiH. Such decisions that the HR clarified using the conclusions passed exactly at the session of the Peace Implementation Council were very often opposite to all Conventions on basic Human Rights. We would appreciate if you would take our suggestions into consideration when passing new decisions to the benefit of all peoples and citizens in BiH.'

Representatives of Croat parties visit the USA – BiH remains US priority!

Representative of the Croat parties, who are paying a 15-day visit to the USA, have met with the Head of the Department for BiH with the State Department, Raffi Gregorian, and discussed the current political situation in BiH with an accent on

Mostar as the focal point of reintegration of both the Federation and BiH.

They also met with Dean Pittman, the Head of the US National Security Department for Southeast Europe, and, once more, discussed the situation in BiH, as well as the fact that BiH is still the priority of the US politics in this region, reports Slobodna Dalmacija.

Vecernji List: Ivica Marinovic, the President of the HDZ Caucus in the House of Representatives: Alliance is buying votes so that it can stay in power

How do you comment on the work of the House of Representatives after the return of the HDZ to the Parliament's benches?'

We have noticed that the Alliance is only interested to remain in power at all costs, even if they have to buy votes for it. We could not understand giving up of the appointment of one Minister because it was an ordinary buying of votes of those, who are against the bill of indictment against those, who committed the war crimes over the Croats, the buying of votes of those who support Sefer Halilovic. The debate on the change of the Law on Budget seemed miserable…(…) First of all, I would like to express my pleasure over the rebellion of the Croats within the SDP. (…) We support efforts of the Associations resulting from the Homeland War. We fully support their efforts to oppose the things that the Alliance wants and, that is to make out of our best sons a group of scorn people. (…)

What can you say about the Law on RTV BiH?

It is an effort of the current authority to have media in their service, and events regarding HRT and Federation TV confirm this theory. (…) First of all we advocate objective and independent journalism. However, the elections will take

place next year so that I believe that the current authority will not have a lot of time to triumph in its media. (…) It is up to us to consolidate our lines, resist temptations and express the will of the Croat people at the elections. We have survived much worse, war times and there is no reason to believe that we shall not survive all this.

Did Alija Izetbegovic Leave The Country?

Glas srpski, on the cover page, carries TANJUG news agency piece saying that return of Alija Izetbegovic from Dubai where he was awarded "An Islamic Person of the year" award was not certain. As TANJUG (Sarajevo branch) learned from sources close to Izetbegovic, he left for Dubai on Monday on a special jet sent to him from United Saudi Emirates. Tanjug sources believe, Glas srpski carries, that former Bosniak Leader actually moved from BiH looking for a shelter in one of Islamic countries where he would be out of reach to SFOR.

Republika Srpska

RS doctors and teachers protest low salaries

AFP reports that doctors and teachers throughout the Republika Srpska on Wednesday staged a one-hour protest against low salaries and poor working conditions. "The situation in RS hospitals has reached alarming proportions," said Milenko Granulic, head of the health trade unions in entity. He warned that hospitals had drugs, food and medical equipment supplies for the next few days only. The doctors are demanding immediate payment of five months of salary arrears, increased salaries and improved supplies of equipment.

A hospital official, Olivera Stankovic, said that unless the authorities undertake some urgent steps, the biggest medical facility in the entity, in Banja Luka, will have to close as it will not be able to provide treatment.

RS teachers also staged a one-hour protest yesterday, demanding the payment of salary arrears, and pay rises. Ranka Misic, head of the RS teacher's union, called for a general strike on December 17 if the government does not meet the teachers' requests.

International Community

High Representative imposes amendments to Property Laws

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, issued on Tuesday a package of thirteen Decisions comprehensively amending the property laws of both entities. In a statement for the press, OHR said that changes were urgently needed, as the increase in the pace of the property law implementation has stalled over recent months, forcing many people to wait before repossessing property. The imposed amendments will reduce the possibility of manipulation and delay, allow for the speedier eviction of multiple occupant, and ensure the full right of refugees and displaced persons to "freely return to their homes of origin," as guaranteed by the Dayton Peace Agreement. This item is on the front page of all Sarajevo dailies today. Banja Luka newspapers carry it on pages 6 and 5. News agencies and electronic media carried the OHR press release already last night.

PIC Steering Board in progress: Streamlining of intentional organizations in BiH – main point on the agenda

Dnevni Avaz reports that a session of the PIC (Peace Implementation Council) Steering Board on the level of Political Directors is in progress in Brussels. According to the daily, one of the most dominant points on the agenda for today will be the process of streamlining of international

organizations in BiH, and which will be presented by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, and his Principal Deputy, Donald Hays. Petritsch will also address the Political Directors and brief them on the general situation in BiH.

Dnevni Avaz: Person in Focus – Colin Munro, head of the OHR South

Dnevni Avaz chooses Colin Munro, the head of the OHR Mostar, for its Person in Focus today. The daily notes that, during his mandate in BiH, Munro made a number of very good moves: he accelerated the implementation of property laws, initiated the reconstruction of Careva mosque in Stolac and advocated more integrated education in this town. Munro is soon to leave BiH and return to Great Britain.

Dnevni List: Colin Munro is leaving Mostar

Colin Munro, a British diplomat and the Head of the OHR South, stated yesterday that he is leaving the duty that he has been performing during the last year and that he goes back to London temporarily. He stated that the name of his successor will be known very soon. Before his coming to Mostar he had been the British Ambassador in the Republic of Croatia. Asked about the reasons of his departure he stated that it is an ordinary British policy that diplomats do not stay in some area longer than it is necessary. Munro was the 6th Head of the IC in Mostar. Before him the IC representatives in Mostar were Ritchard Ellorkmann (Germany), Finn Lynghjem (Norway), Mratin Garrod (Great Britain), Peres Casado (Spain) and Hans Koschnik (Germany).

Vecernji List reports that the Head of the Office of the High Representative in Mostar, Colin Munro, in his farewell press conference, “swooped down” on the journalists, criticizing those present of not having asked him a single difficult question in the one year of his mission in Mostar. However, he could not (did not want) to say what his next diplomatic

destination will be, and only mentioned London and his family, also failing to say who his successor will be on the post of Head of the OHR South.

Nevertheless, Munro inspired a shred of optimism by saying that the place of Mostar and the region in Europe is the same as that of Croatia.

Four years ago, as he was assuming the duty of British Ambassador to Croatia, Croatia, says Munro, was in the mud of stagnating nationalism. Today, the doors to the European Union are wide open to it.

He also criticized the HDZ BiH leadership by saying that Croat self-rule is a blind alley that stands for much dishonest things used for presenting personal interests, reads Vecernji List.

Slobodna Dalmacija reports that the Head of the Office of the High Representative in Mostar, Colin Munro, is soon leaving the duty he has been performing in Mostar for the past year and is going back to London, as he said himself at a press conference.

In his last press statement in Mostar, he expressed his disappointment at the media here, and said that they are not doing enough research work and that in the four years (NB: obvious mistake by Fena news agency which originally published the report carried by SD) of his stay none of the journalists put him a difficult question. To this remark the journalists replied that he was not present in the press conferences too often, unlike his predecessors.

Editorials

(provided by OHR Mostar)

Dnevni List and Vecernji List: Elimination from political scene threatens HDZ BiH

Mario Brkic, an OHR Spokesperson, stated for Dnevni Avaz: 'As of March 7, 2001, Jelavic has been performing the duty of the HDZ President illegally.' Dnevni List revealed that on June 22 the HDZ handed over the request to the Cantonal Court in Mostar on the removal of the party seat from Sarajevo to Mostar, on the registration of the party in the register of political organizations with this Court and verification of the Statute and Program Declaration of the party. In September this year, the Council of this court accepted the HDZ request and changed the party seat from Sarajevo to Mostar.

The request for the HDZ re-registration is already in the Court and Judge Kata Zovko, that we could not reach yesterday, will decide on it.

Castimir Mandaric, the President of the Cantonal Court in Mostar, was also busy and he could not give answer to this question. Jelavic's Spokesperson Tihomir Begic sent us to other HDZ officials, saying that he is not competent to talk about the issues related to the registration of the party. Jospi Merdzo, the party's Secretary General, told us 'that he would not involve in legal issues', referring to 'non-competent' Tihomir Begic. At last we got a reply from one high-ranked HDZ official, who wanted to stay anonymous: 'If the HDZ is registered at the competent court I do not see a single reason because of which this party could not be registered for the elections. If the party was registered according to valid regulations, everything else is politicizing for daily political purposes, either well intentionally or tendentiously. I believe that there are no any obstacles to prevent the party to participate in some process such as the political one. The possibility that they refuse the HDZ request for the re-registration because of the re-election of Ante Jelavic should not be excluded. However, such decision would mean the elimination of the leading Croat

political party from the political scene only because they elected for its President a person that the IC and HR do not like.

This act would drastically infringe not only democratic principles but also, in the case of Jelavic, a basic human right on political engagement, that is, the right to vote and be elected. There is no any doubt that non-democratic elimination of the leading political party from the political scene would have strong repercussions on the position of the Croats in BiH.

Vecernji List carries on the same issue that a high-ranked HDZ official stated: 'If the prerequisites for the re-registration of the party is the withdrawal of Jelavic and his party colleagues, that the HR removed, they will do it without any problems. If this happens the HDZ BiH will have to hold the 8th Convention at which they would have to elect a new eligible leadership. If the HDZ is registered properly, it has been already speculated that it will not show up at the elections alone but in the coalition with the political block of the Croat parties gathered around the Croat National Assembly.

Lidija Korac was appointed the Head of the Permanent Election Commission, and she was recommended by Kresimir Zubak and Robert Barry. This detail might be of an extreme importance with regard to the final decision on the HDZ participation at the elections, since it is well known that Jelavic and Zubak, that is the HDZ and NHI, are in a great conflict.

Vecernji List: Nobody is perfect

Written by Zdenko Cosic

The commentary starts by saying that everyone should agree that the state of human rights in BiH is below all levels of a civilized society.

"No one wants to admit the fact that Croats, as the fewest

people in BiH, are, accordingly the most endangered people in terms of human and national rights. If we know who holds the mandate of the international community, admitting this fact would also mean admitting to one's own powerlessness and a total failure of the methods that BiH is using in its attempts to become a democratic and civilized country.

The only success that the international mentors and caretakers of this country can boast about is a balanced distribution of injustice. A bizarre truth is that the only consolation we can get for our own troubles are the troubles that others have. One of the most terrible forms of human rights violation is the legalized one. How many people in this country have been stripped of their rights by decrees imposed by the High Representative? Today, when no smart person needs to be told about the imperfections of the Dayton Agreement, everyone agrees it is necessary to change it. Until recently, any request in that regard would have been declared a satanic verse, and its author would have been ousted from public life by a simple decision of Mr. Petritsch. The High Representative himself realizes the imperfection of the Peace Agreement. If only he would admit to his being imperfect as well, we could expect a withdrawal of the decisions that will certainly be testifying of the dark sides of the politics of the international community during his mandate. Those disgraceful decisions will remain to testify about him as a person, as well as about his idea of human rights," says Vecernji List.