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Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia

Rige od Fere str. #20, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia
tel./fax +381 11 30 32 408; e-mail office@helsinki.org.rs ;
www.helsinki.org.rs

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Belgrade and Banjaluka: Together for Partition of Bosnia

Serbia's attitude towards Bosnia is the biggest stumbling block in the way of regional stabilization. Serbia's aspirations towards Bosnia date back from the Berlin Congress (1878), annexation crisis in 1908 to present. Serbia's national elite accepted the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995) as the most optimal achievement against the international backdrop of the time. Ever since Serbia has been pursuing the strategy¹ that has practically incorporated Republika Srpska /RS/ into its economic and cultural space.

After Kosovo's independence declaration, RS Premier Milorad Dodik fully opened his cards: Republika Srpska is going to request the same Kosovo got – independence. Dodik's statements radicalized the situation in Bosnia and questioned its very survival. Therefore, the international community – the US in the first place – had to intensify its engagement in the region: to impose a revision of the Dayton Peace Agreement and thus secure functioning of the Bosnian state.

¹ The strategy was developed back in 1997 at a meeting organized by the Institute for Geopolitical Studies. Participants in the meeting agreed that „survival of Republika Srpska was of among Serb nation's national and statehood interests.“ In the preface for the book „Creation of Republika Srpska“ by Nikola Koljevic (2008), Dobrica Ćosić writes, „Thanks to all troops and commanders of the Army of Republika Srpska the first Serb state on the other bank of the Drina River was created. After a series of painful national defeats, that was a major victory of the Serb people in the last decade of the 20th century.“



www.stormfront.org/forum/

The Butmir process, launched to result in a tripartite agreement on constitutional amendment, failed in its first stage. However, the process went on behind the scene – diplomatic actions going on at the international arena aim at securing a minimal consensus on constitutional reforms.

The European Union takes that only functional states can be in its membership – actually that “Bosnia-Herzegovina's application for membership of the EU can be taken under consideration only once the OHR Office closes down since no quasi-protectorates can accede to EU.”² According to Olli Rehn, EU's goal is to have “Bosnia-Herzegovina a reliable applicant for membership of NATO and EU” and that, the same as all other countries, it “must be capable to adopt and implement EU standards.”³ Belgrade strategists have been adjusting themselves the changeable inter-

² *Beta*, October 15, 2009.

³ *Ibid.*

national circumstances, insisting on a status quo for Republika Srpska and looking forward to Russia's stronger influence in foreseeable future. This was probably best illustrated at the recent meeting the Belgrade-seated Center for National Strategy (headed by Svetozar Stojanovic) organized in Banjaluka in early December 2009. It testified of the general consensus that RS can survive only under the condition that the Dayton Peace Agreement remains unchanged. Today, Belgrade and Milorad Dodik aspire to safeguard Republika Srpska's competences or to have Bosnia-Herzegovina turned into a federation, which would open the door to RS secession.

A grey area in Serbia's politics still predominates all strategic issues and influences incumbent policymakers. True, the global crisis has rather sped up the incumbent cabinet's option for EU accession – the option that has not been fully defined yet due to the absence of political consensus.

Republika Srpska's attitude towards Bosnia

What Dodik stresses out in his many statements is that Serbia, as a signatory and a guarantor of the Dayton Peace Agreement, has a constructive approach to political negotiations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and supports integrity of RS, and that only agreement and dialogue lead to a sustainable solution. He also underlines that no solution whatsoever should question integrity of the country and stability of the region – for the region can become a part of Europe only if stable and prosperous.

Dodik speaks of his very good relations with Tadic's Democratic Party despite the fact that he communicates with other politicians at the same time. Referring to special relations between RS and Serbia, he puts emphasis on Serbia's proactive attitude towards regional stability. However, Serbia's role as a signatory and guarantor of the Dayton Accords has been deliberately sidetracked recently by "some foreigners in Bosnia-Herzegovina," he adds. Therefore, "Serbia should resume its role so as to finally take upon itself the

responsibility for /the provisions of/ the Dayton Peace Agreement."⁴

Throughout the Butmir process Dodik was trying to impose a constitutional provision on entities' right to referendum on status, the right implying "agreement of all parties." "It is unacceptable that the Council of Ministers turns into a government and that Bosnia-Herzegovina has a premier," he said when it came to the announced constitutional reforms. He turned down the demand whereby the House of Peoples would no longer have the legislative authority but would be a place for raising the issues of vital national interest. These issues would be consequently decided on either by parliamentary committees or the Constitutional Court.

Dodik insisted that his party, SNSD, was "not interested in" constitutional reforms in Bosnia-Herzegovina and would not be involved in anything that diminishes "the Dayton capacity" of RS. However, he added, his party would be only glad to see the actual Constitution adjusted to the European Convention on Human Rights and Freedoms. For Dodik, the Dayton Peace Agreement is a lasting solution. And the official Belgrade supports this stance of his. For him, the approach to the constitutional reform is wrong as it ignores the Dayton Peace Agreement on which Bosnia-Herzegovina was founded, as well as the procedure for any constitutional change. Milorad Dodik has turned down any motion aimed at reducing entities' competences – and has obviously acted with the blessing from Belgrade.

Reactions to the two rounds of Butmir negotiations testify that Belgrade and Banjaluka think as one about revision of the Dayton Peace Agreement. In a letter to US Ambassador Charles English and the Swedish Presidency of the EU, Dodik says the draft submitted to him reveals that the negotiations with domestic leaders were nothing but a smoke screen for "a package that has already been tailored to the will of only one constituent people in Bosnia – Bosniaks." "We were taken aback by the contents of the package sent to us and consider it anti-Dayton, politically incorrect and unacceptable basis for discussion...For SNSD, any

⁴ Talk show *Kažiprst*, Radio B92, October 28, 2009.

⁵ *Politika*, October 14, 2009.

action that might be taken in this regard will a direct interference in internal affairs of a sovereign state," he states in the letter.⁶

Commenting the failure of the first stage of the Butmir process, Dodik said, "The negotiations ended by the defeat of the politicians who had put forth maximalist demands for changes of the Constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina and believed would impose solutions on us should we fail to come to an agreement." He said constitutional reforms were possible only under the conditions that were products of "domestic reasoning" and a consensus in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bosnia-Herzegovina is constitutionally and legally qualified for Euro-Atlantic integrations, but lacks "political will" for speedier movement towards EU and NATO, he said. For him, "political will" implies acknowledgment of realities – "existence and maintenance of a Dayton-allocated position of Republika Srpska within Bosnia Herzegovina."⁷ "The only agreement that can be reached is the one on adjustment of Bosnia's Constitution to the European Convention of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms," said the vice-president of PDP, Slobodan Nagradic, for his part.

Dodik's statements clearly indicate his attitude towards the Bosnian state. He insists that OHR and the international community in general should withdraw from Bosnia-Herzegovina so that it could become a normal state. One of his demands has been met. International prosecutors and judges of the Court for Organized Crime have been withdrawn as such and invested with advisory power only. Referring to a census in Bosnia, Dodik said, "We do not want to be Bosnians, we are Serbs and this is how most of us wants to declare themselves...It is not our responsibility that an agreement on census has not been reached yet. RS insists that census includes information about national, religious and linguistic affiliation." "This is not contrary to European standards, but is contrary to some plans for turning all the people into

Bosnians or some other nation just like that," he added.⁸

Serbia's attitude towards RS

Serbia's official statements can be summed up as follows: Serbia will not interfere into negotiations between political leaders in Bosnia-Herzegovina but looks forward to a compromise; Serbia will back any decision made by representatives of RS; and, Serbia is dedicated to the Dayton Peace Agreement.

President Tadic's statements range between Serbia's need to meet EU expectations vis-à-vis its course to accession and its own strategic aspirations towards RS. On several occasions, Tadic pointed out that Serbia kept a constructive approach to political negotiations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and that he himself was convinced that only agreement and democratic dialogue could lead to a solution sustainable in the years to come – a solution that could "take that state /Bosnia-Herzegovina/ to membership of EU, which is Serbia's topmost national goal."⁹

Basically, Tadic's stance boils down to the following statement: "Serbia and Croatia are guarantors of the Dayton Agreement and, therefore, of integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Serbia is lastingly committed to the Dayton Agreement and that political position. The Dayton Agreement can be changed only under the condition that all the three parties agree. Whatever legitimate representatives of Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs agree on is acceptable for Serbia. Positions on which legitimate representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina fail to agree on are not acceptable for Serbia."¹⁰

"No one would any more want to see any action that generates instability and questions integrity of people – citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina regardless of their national origin – and their property. These are the principles on which Serbia builds its regional policy and these are the principles securing Serbia the position of a highly respected country in the international community – because these are the principles of the policy of recon-

⁶ *Politika*, October 29, 2009.

⁷ *Politika*, October 21, 2009.

⁸ *Dnevni Avaz*, November 22, 2009.

⁹ *Beta* October 16, 2009.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

ciliation, dialogue, agreement and solution of all burning issues,” said Tadic.¹¹

On the eve of the Butmir negotiations Tadic met with most relevant political representatives of RS. At the meeting, they agreed that Serbia would pressurize RS no longer and would further support the Dayton Agreement, the two-entity Bosnia-Herzegovina and any solution the three constituent peoples reach.¹²

“Serbia is my political responsibility and RS my moral responsibility,” Tadic messaged RS leaders at the meeting. He also said that “Butmir negotiations” should lead to a compromise that would move Bosnia-Herzegovina towards Euro-Atlantic integrations. “Serbia would not be placed in a context of bad solutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as that would only a burden on its shoulders,” said Tadic.¹³

For Cedomir Antic, historian and president of the Progressive Club, annulment of entity vote is a very bad solution though the international community will be insisting on it nevertheless. “Bosnia-Herzegovina should be a federation. Abolishment of RS would not result in a functional state but only deprive the Serb people of the rights some regions and nations in Europe – in Germany, Belgium or Spain – already exercise,” says Antic. According to him, a balance in Bosnia-Herzegovina implies acknowledgement of the actual state of affairs and Bosnia must be totally demilitarized. Should entities be abolished, he says, the rights of the three constituent peoples would boil down to ethnology and cultural identity in the next ten years.¹⁴

All the three parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina must agree on all issues under discussion in the Butmir military base, said Serbian Foreign Minis-

ter Vuk Jeremic, adding that “otherwise Serbia would support any.” “We shall do all in our power to make sure that the tripartite agreement is reached. Without a dialogue there no solution can be found,” said Jeremic. And Serbia’s and Russia’s position in this matter coincide, he point out. Quoting its Belgrade-seated diplomatic sources, *Politika* writes that it was the visit by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev that encouraged Serbia to get more engaged in the debate on constitutional reforms in Bosnia-Herzegovina. When reporters from Bosnia’s federal media remarked that Premier Milorad Dodik had spent more time in Belgrade than in Banjaluka during the negotiations, Jeremic said that was not his impression, adding, “Dodik is always most welcome in Belgrade, the same as all other democratically elected representatives of any people in Bosnia-Herzegovina.”¹⁵

According to Jeremic, Bosnia-Herzegovina is Serbia’s closest and most neighbor and Serbia will back any agreement in the Federation resulting from full concord of the three constituent peoples. “Our common future is in EU, and I am sure we shall all be successful /in joining EU/ if we support one another,” he said, adding, “Serbia has good intentions and wants to help with advise, given that the stability in the Balkans is our mutual problem.” “Without stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there is no stability in the Balkans. Any problem in Bosnia-Herzegovina would affect us all,” he said.¹⁶

Russia’s position

Statements by Russian officials are mostly identical to the stands of Serb politicians in both Belgrade and Banjaluka. “We have never been under the impression that Banjaluka was intent to disintegrate Bosnia-Herzegovina,” said Russian Ambassador to Bosnia Alexander Harchenko.¹⁷ He also pointed out that his country would never give its support to disintegration of Bosnia-Herzegovina – for, Russia’s stand is clear and principled: a sovereign and unique Bosnia.

Referring to constitutional reforms in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Russian Am-

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Apart from Dodik, Preisident of the Serb Radical Party of RS Milanko Mihajlic, President of the Serb Democratic Party Mladen Bosnic, Vice-president of the Party of Democratic Progress Branislav Borenovic, President of the Democratic Party Dragan Cavic, President of the Democratic People’s Alliance Marko Pavic and President of the Socialist Party of RS Petar Djokic attended the meeting with the President of Serbia.

¹³ *Beta*, October 17-18, 2009.

¹⁴ *Politika*, October 19, 2009.

¹⁵ *Politika*, October 23, 2009.

¹⁶ *Kurir*, October 23, 2009.

¹⁷ *Glas Javnosti*, November 2, 2009.

bassador said a change in the Dayton Peace Agreement could only be “a domestic product” – a decision made by political leaders of the country, whereas the international community can only have an advisory role in the process. No constitution can be changed overnight, as he put it, and hence Russia advocates the course charted by the Peace Implementation Council. “Russia takes that the Office of the High Representative should be closed down first and re-placed by an office of EU representative. Only then there could be a constitutional reform that is agreed on by all political leaders in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” said Harchenko.¹⁸

During his visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also made sure to emphasize, “Russia is ready to intensively cooperate to have the OHR closed down in Bosnia-Herzegovina – actually to have it transformed into an office of a special EU representative.”

By saying that his talks with Russian representatives focus on economic projects such as gasification plants or oil refineries, Dodik best illustrated the relations between RS and Russia. “They also say they are supporting the Dayton Agreement and an internal dialogue. On the other hand, under the pretext of political correctness in the past fifteen years Westerners have always been imposing politically unfair solutions on RS to make it a loser and give it nothing in return,” says Dodik.¹⁹

Propaganda from Serbia

At the time constitutional reforms in Bosnia-Herzegovina were under discussion, the media in Serbia were alerting about the threat of Vehabits – of Islamic fundamentalism. A group of young people that have allegedly planned terrorist actions were on trial in Belgrade. Such propaganda corresponds to the thesis about the Islam danger upheld by some countries in the West. The media in Serbia abundantly feature such theories, which, in

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Talk show *Kažiprst*, Radio B92, October 28, 2009.

brief, boil down to the story about Serbia fighting radical Islam in Bosnia and about a danger of an Islam state in the heart of Europe. This is about the same thesis Belgrade was propagating in 1990s and which was “proved” by the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001.

On the other hand, there is a thesis that the extent to which Vehabits are influential in Serbia, Kosovo and Metohija, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina is in the hands of US and its Western allies. “The Vehabit movement has never broken its good relations with the West and the West has never renounced its services. Vehabits are very influential in the region. From what country and at which point poison arrows will be used against Serbia are contingent on the West’s interests,” says Professor Radoslav Gacinovic.²⁰

According to Professor Gacinovic, senior researcher at the Institute for Political Studies, in the last two decades of the 20th century Saudi Arabia has spent over 70 billions USD on strengthening the Vehabit sect, fundamentalism and jihad worldwide. About 1,500 mosques, 210 Islamic centers, 202 Islamic universities and 2,000 Islamic schools in non-Islamic countries were constructed with these funds. At the beginning of the 21st century, one-third of fifty Islamic organizations benefiting from such “international assistance” cooperated with terrorist organizations in the Balkans, claims Gacinovic. In the past two decade, Bosnia-Herzegovina has been a training ground for a variety of organizations that hardly inspire hope for peace, he explains.²¹

As they side with Republika Srpska, the media in Serbia have been seizing every opportunity to show Bosniaks in bad light. “The protectorate over Bosnia – along with Draconian Bonn powers mostly used to discipline Serbs and, occasionally, Croats – can no more find the way out of its own maze,” says a commentary run by *Vecernje Novosti*.

As a majority nation, Bosniaks got used to the benefits they have been receiving from the biased and generous foreign factor for years and would not give all that up now, says the commentary. “Today, centralization of Bosnia-Herzegovina bothers not just Serbs – the

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Politika*, November 9, 2009.

Croat part of the Federation starts inclining towards independence... Serbs would give in no more and renounce the mechanisms the Constitutions guarantees them. Croats are under majority rule in the Federation and, therefore, want to form an administrative unit of their own or a third entity. Bosniaks are after a centralized state they would dominate. Hence, today it is almost impossible to fulfill the final condition for closing down OHR – creation of a normal political climate,” concludes the commentary.²²

Assistance from Belgrade

A “scholarly” forum under the auspices of the Center for National Strategy and under the baton of Professor Svetozar Stojanovic (close to Dobrica Cosic and the SANU circle behind the infamous Memorandum) was organized in Banjaluka “in defense of RS.” Some forty academicians and researchers participated in the debate. It also assembled advisers to President Tadic and ex-premier Kostunica (Trivo Indjic and Slobodan Samardzic) and politicians such as Milorad Dodik and President of RS Rajko Kuzmanovic. Many so-called senators of RS, obtaining their titles in wartime when they logistically helped RS to become a reality, were also present. The main message the gathering sent was that the Dayton Peace Agreement was the only solid foundation on which RS could survive and, therefore, should be defended by all legal and legitimate means. Besides, Professor Stojanovic pointed out that the changed constellation of global powers “ruled out the possibility of imposing any solution on Bosnia-Herzegovina.” “Solutions must be sought for through dialogue and agreement between two entities and three peoples in Bosnia-Herzegovina. All the potentials of their mutual ties have not been used yet,” said Stojanovic.²³

President of RS Rajko Kuzmanovic said the Dayton Peace Agreement was “an international act that cannot be changed just like that but has to be implemented.” “Bosnia can be only a

composite state and never a unitarian one,” he explained. As for Dodik, he stressed, “RS is a constitutional and political fait accompli – and no one can take this away from us.”

Addressing the issue of national identity, Bogdana Koljevic said that any insistence on centralization of Bosnia-Herzegovina negated people’s will and democratic principles. “Respect for the Dayton Peace Accord equals the respect for Serb identity,” she said. Mile Savic pointed out that “Bosnia-Herzegovina’s membership of NATO would not guarantee survival of RS unless Serbia joins NATO too.” Some participants insisted that the threat of “Palestinianization hovers over Bosnia-Herzegovina because Bosniaks want the entire country just for themselves.”²⁴

Reactions at Croatian President Mesic’s statements

As the term of his office nears an end, Croatian President Stjepan Mesic uses stronger and stronger language for Dodik’s responsibility for the situation in Bosnia. “If Dodik would not recognize Bosnia-Herzegovina and says he will arrange secession in a referendum – and is, at the same time, welcomed in Serbia with honors – it is about a suspicious policy as far as I am concerned,” says Mesic. Mesic accused Dodik of pursuing a destructive policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina and of following on Milosevic’s policy only by other means. “Such policy may lead to new instability and conflicts,” says he.²⁵

Tadic stood up for Dodik, arguing that he /Dodik/ was a responsible man aware that he should not take steps that were contrary to the interests of the Serb people in Republika Srpska. Statements as such coming from the region do no good and do not take into account the entire context of political processes, said Tadic, adding “Serbia will never take a single step that might disintegrate any country in the region, since such a step would jeopardize its integrity.”²⁶

“I hope Croatia would contribute to regional stability and respect for human rights of all ethnic communities, and would make it possible for the Serbs will-

²² *Novosti*, November 21, 2009.

²³ *Politika*, December 14, 2009.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Beta*, November 26, 2009.

ing to return to Croatia to exercise their right. I also hope property rights of our compatriots in Croatia would be settled,” said Tadic.²⁷

Regardless of the party in power, Serbia’s strategy for Bosnia-Herzegovina is a constant. Belgrade has not given up its strategic goals in Bosnia: the safeguard of Republika Srpska as laid down in the Dayton Peace Agreement. Therefore, it seizes every opportunity to insist on status quo and invoke the Dayton Agreement as “the only legal and legitimate international act” defining relations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Banjaluka gathering and composition of its participants testifies that Serbia’s strategy remained the same – even at the cost of Bosnian Serbs’ defeat.

Republika Srpska can survive only with the support from Belgrade and Moscow. Over the past fifteen years Belgrade’s strategy has been aimed at incorporating RS into Serbia’s economic and cultural space: and in this Belgrade was successful. Besides, a climate in which younger generations look up to Belgrade rather than to Sarajevo has been created.

The international community is responsible for inconsequent implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Otherwise, it would have prevented definite establishment of ethnically pure entities. The policy for return of refugees has been inconsequent too, the same as insistence on due cooperation with the tribunal in The Hague.

The potential of the Dayton Agreement for creating a functional state of Bosnia-Herzegovina has not been used in full. RS can survive as an entity but only in the places where Serbs were in the majority before the outbreak of 1992 war. Belgrade has not demonstrated adequate readiness to influence RS for a more active engagement in constitutional revision leading to a functional state.

On the contrary, Belgrade parrots that it will “support everything the three peoples agree on.” Russia takes the same stance and, of course, Republika Srpska.

Milorad Dodik is trying to win over Bosnian Croats to support his plan for a third entity – for, Croats’ support would strengthen his position of Bosnia’s federalization. A part of Croat population agrees with him given that their position in Bosnia has not been optimally settled. However, Croatia’s position is different. Among other things, Croatia is aware that “Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina are gradually disappearing” and that only constitutional rearrangement could put an end to the process. For the time being, the idea about three entities, plus two with mixed population, is in play.

Milorad Dodik insists on a referendum in RS and its right to self-determination – and this fully corresponds to Belgrade’s plans. This could be a dangerous scenario leading to a conflict in which the Serb side could lose everything as it did in Croatia.

A lobby group for maintenance of Bosnia-Herzegovina needs to be reestablished: a group that would actively search for the solutions that contribute to establishment of a functional state. Some international actors are so disinterested in the matter that they suggest acknowledgment of the reality in the field.

EU’ decision to leave Bosnia out of the Shengen visa regime additionally stigmatizes Bosnian Muslims. Postponement of MAPA plan for Bosnia also secures Belgrade a maneuver space as it makes it possible to constantly question membership of NATO – of Serbia and RS, i.e. Bosnia.

The fact that NATO was a main instrument of reconciliation in post-WWII Europe should not be forgotten. The policy of conditioning has been exhausted in Bosnia – moreover, it has become counterproductive as it actually fuels RS’ potential for blackmail.

²⁷ Ibid.