** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Thursday, 10 April 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**Nikolic, Chepurin: Serbian still neutral regarding Ukraine (*RTS*)**

Serbian President Tomislav **Nikolic** pointed out in talks with the Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander **Chepurin** that Serbia continues to stand on the neutral position regarding the situation in Ukraine. “Our sincere and firm friendship with the Russian Federation and my personal respect for President Putin is not brought into question,” emphasized Nikolic and expressed hope that the situation will be resolved peacefully through dialogue and compromise. “Russia has taken a resolute stance to protect its people and its interest, and I believe that it should remain on the path of resolving the issue diplomatically through dialogue,” stressed Nikolic. Chepurin said that Russia appreciates the friendship and the principled stance of Serbia. He also conveyed to the Serbian President a message from Putin, who pointed to the difficult situation of the Ukrainian economy and called upon the European partners to conduct urgent consultations at the level of economy, finance and energy ministers in order to propose harmonized measures intended to stabilize Ukraine’s economy and ensure the supply and transit of the Russian gas in accordance with the signed agreements.

**Vulin: Kosovo also in the focus of the new government (*RTS/Tanjug*)**

Outgoing Serbian Minister in charge of Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar **Vulin** has said that a new Serbian government, which should be formed by the end of the month, will not change its policy on the southern province. “That will be the policy of non-recognition of the unilaterally proclaimed independence of Kosovo, and the policy of negotiating and agreeing on the normalization of life in Kosovo and Metohija,” Vulin told reporters after the signing of an agreement on the donation for building a department of the Musical High School in Kosovska Mitrovica. He underlined that Kosovo will always be in the focus of the Serbian government, as has been the case so far, regardless of who will be responsible for the province in the next Serbian government. Referring to the opposition of the Kosovo Ministry of Local Self-Government to the adoption of the Statute of the Union of Serb Municipalities in northern Kosovo, Vulin voiced confidence that the document will be adopted. The text of the Statute will be discussed by representatives of local self-governments, he said, underscoring that they are not just puppets of Belgrade, Pristina and Brussels, but elected representatives of citizens in northern Kosovo. “We have to get accustomed to the fact that northern Kosovo has legally and legitimately elected bodies, and that their word is respected,” the Serbian Minister said. Vulin noted that the drafting of the Statute is in his competence, and voiced confidence that an agreement would be reached regarding the best solutions for Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija.

**Rikalo: Serbs denied right to vote (*Novosti*)**

“During the voting at the local elections last November it was evident that several generations of Serbs from northern Kosovo do not have the right to vote. Those are mostly the ones who have just turned 18 and acquired the right to vote after 1999 and there are 2,000 to 3,000 of them. They were returned from polling stations because they were not on the lists,” the Serb member of the Central Election Commission Nenad **Rikalo** tells ***Novosti***. Rikalo points to this example as only one of the irregularities that are following the Kosovo electoral list that has not been updated for years. That is why there is this paradoxical situation of having more voters than inhabitants, while central elections are knocking on the door... “A serious examination of data has been launched and it is possible that around 30,000 dead people will be erased from the list. With already 55,000 erased in November, this is around 90,000 less people.”

**In what way can unregistered Serb voters be registered on the electoral list in order to vote at the upcoming parliamentary elections?**

“Regulations are such that they can’t vote without Kosovo documents. A new agreement in Brussels is necessary for harmonizing the Kosovo list with the one that the Serbian state has. That is the only way out of this situation.”

**Is it realistic to have central elections before summer?**

“There are serious hints that they will be at the end of May or at the beginning of June. That is one option.”

**Is there enough time to resolve problems with the electoral lists until then?**

“In that case, the working groups that are dealing with this issue would have to urgently convene in Brussels.”

**Albanian protests during Djukanovic’s visit to Washington D.C. (*Novosti*)**

Around 1,000 dissatisfied Albanians with national and U.S. symbols, the map of the “Greater Albania” that read “Malesija, Presevo, Mitrovica, Sandzak – we are one” waited for Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo **Djukanovic** near the White House in Washington D.C. prior to his meeting U.S. Vice President Joseph **Biden**. They requested the U.S. to block Montenegro’s NATO membership, for Tuzi to finally receive the status of a full-fledged municipality, along with the warning that the resolution of this issue cannot be postponed any longer. They also announced that one of their key demands will be to enable Albanians in Montenegro to form a union of municipalities, like the Serbs were enabled in Kosovo and Metohija. On the same day, around 350 Albanians in Plav near Mt. Prokletije also organized a protest where they requested a better status in Montenegro, ability to display their flag where and when they want to, the right to education in line with the plan and program with a unified spelling book for their children. It is interesting that the authorities in Podgorica didn’t react to last Sunday’s gathering in Tuzi, where the protesters displayed the national, U.S. and Kosovo flags, but not the Montenegrin. Yet, there was an official reaction when Serbian flags were displayed in Berane on 9 March after the victory of the opposition.

**The Kosovo precedent and consistently being inconsistent (*Politika*, by Zoran Ivosevic, full professor at the Faculty of Law of the Union University)**

International law has its sources in conventions, customs and generally accepted rules. However, international relations also depend on precedents imposed by the great powers through the will of crude power. Such a precedent was also by the secession bid of the province of Kosovo and Metohija from its sovereign, the state of Serbia, launched after the 78-day NATO bombardment, led by the U.S. that was conducted in the spring of 1999 without the consent of the UN Security Council, in which there were more than 3,000 human casualties. Following up that precedent, the same forces were arbitrarily imposed their order in Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011). And then followed the unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) of the southern Serbian province that was proclaimed by the Kosovo Albanian representatives in the provisional institutions of self-government in the province on 17 February 2008, declaring that the sovereign Serbian territory, under UN administration, was now the “republic of Kosovo”. The U.S. immediately recognized this surrogate state, into which the U.S. had already installed its largest military base in the Balkans.

Driven by this precedent, Russia recognized, in 2008, the independence bids of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, regions with majority populations that were sympathetic to Russia which seceded from Georgia in 1990, i.e. in 1992, with the political and military support of the above-mentioned great power. Pridnestrovie (Transdinestria), which seceded from Moldova in 1992, also had Russian support, but without recognition, although it accepted the stationing of 1,500 Russian soldiers.

And then Crimea happened. After the Kiev rebellion over the President Yanukovich’s refusal to sign the association agreement with the EU, the residents of the Crimean autonomous republic, encouraged with the Russian support and without a fired bullet, declared at a referendum, with a majority of 96 percent (of a turnout which was 83 percent of the electoral body), their independence from Ukraine and wish to join Russia, after which Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin and Crimean leaders, on 18 March, signed a merger agreement.

On that occasion, President Putin stated that the Crimean authorities, while declaring independence, relied on the “famous Kosovo precedent created by the countries of the West”. Since the International Court of Justice in the decision on Kosovo stated that “international law doesn’t contain any kind of applicable prohibition against declaring independence” and that “no general prohibition of unilateral declaration of independence stems from the practice of the Security Council”, Putin concluded that Western reprehensions to Russia “are not even double standards anymore, but astounding cynicism”.

Putin’s reaction illustrates that Russia, without changing the stand towards the province of Kosovo, has used, with the art of the possible, the Kosovo precedent to stop, in the interest of Russia’s own security, the enlargement of the U.S., i.e. NATO influence to the East, making it clear that the precedent produced by the U.S., as a great power, isn’t only valid for the U.S. (which can repeat it when, and however much, it wants), but also for any great power in the same or a similar situation.

Recently at a meeting on nuclear security in the Netherlands, U.S. President Barak Obama said that Russia was simply a regional power, which can only be understood as meaning that it doesn’t have the capacity of a world power, so that the Kosovo precedent would be available for Moscow. Putin responded: “Fifteen years ago, you illegally bombed the Serbs and seized their province of Kosovo. So why don’t you, now, try to attack us as well and seize Crimea from us?”

Obama didn’t have an answer, but the other day he uttered a lie in Brussels that “Kosovo left Serbia after a referendum organized in cooperation with the United Nations”. If it were so, then the UN Security Council would not continue to uphold Resolution 1244, according to which Kosovo is a sovereign and integral part of Serbia.

Considering the aftermath of the Kosovo precedent, that has already occurred or will occur (the Russian region of Donetsk in Ukraine has already taken the Crimean path, while unilateral independence has been already announced by the Irish, Scottish, Catalonians, Basques, Venetians and others), it would be logical for the U.S., as the creator of the precedent, to think about the dangerous process of the retailoring of state borders. But, the U.S. does not want to be logical. Instead, U.S. Ambassador in Belgrade Michael Kirby expects the victim of the precedent – Serbia – to re-think its position. On the occasion of Crimea’s secession, he addressed Serbian citizens like this: “When we speak about what Serbia should do, you must ask yourselves how you view your territory. Think about your view on territorial integrity. Are you consistent? Where, in all that, are the Russian actions? Do you believe that the fact that Russia took Kosovo as an example (for Crimea’s secession) is a suitable analogy? Or do you think that, perhaps, it is not?”.

Our view over the territorial integrity is determined by the Serbian Constitution. It states that the territory of the Republic of Serbia is unique and indivisible and that its borders are inviolable (Article 8), as well as that the Province of Kosovo and Metohija is an integral part of the territory of the sovereign state of Serbia (preamble). It would have stayed this way if it was not for the U.S.-imposed Kosovo precedent, which started the era of consistency in the inconsistent implementation of international law. A monument to this process was erected in Belgrade’s Tasmajdan Park, next to the Radio and Television of Serbian building, which was destroyed with a “merciful bomb” from NATO that has a single word: “Why?”. Perhaps his Excellency could also think about that word!

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**Inzko: To reach compromise on state law on residency (*Fena*)**

The High Representative in B&H Valentin **Inzko** has assessed that the issue of residency should be resolved at the B&H level, pointing out that essentially there are not many differences that could not be overcome. Inzko told the press in Bijeljina that not all possibilities of communication and finding a compromise on this issue have been exhausted. “I hope that a law will be passed at the state level, just as in the past. The SDA, which in a sense represents a returnee population, only wants one supplement, for this new law to be applied to returnees,” stressed the HR. He adds that this has already been incorporated into the law in a certain sense, but that they want additionally to be explicitly mentioned in two-three places. “I think this a small compromise and a small request and that a solution can and should be found,” ***Fena*** quoted Inzko as having said.

**Agreement on cooperation of Serbian, Montenegrin and RS police teams (*Srna*)**

The police directors of Serbia, Montenegro and the Republika Srpska (RS) have agreed in a meeting in Belgrade that joint police teams should strengthen cooperation in the fight against all forms of organized crime. “We want to ensure through joint work that no criminal in the territory of Serbia, Montenegro, the RS, the Federation B&H and wider, can be safe,” Serbian Police Director Milorad **Veljovic** told reporters after a meeting on Wednesday. He said that joint teams should exchange information on a daily basis so as to prevent criminal gangs from causing any destabilization of the area. “It is important that we send a message to citizens that this area is safe and that their police must be a factor of stability in the region,” Veljovic underlined. He noted that, during the meeting, pieces of information were exchanged concerning the murder of Rade **Rakonjac**, former bodyguard of Zeljko **Raznatovic Arkan**, the late criminal and leader of the “Tigers” paramilitary unit in the beginning of the war in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, who was killed in Belgrade downtown on 2 April. Veljovic explained that, when it comes to clashes between criminal gangs, retribution usually follows, so new murders could happen, and that is why police should act preventively. He added that the exchange of information between the police of Serbia, Montenegro and the RS yielded some findings, so new arrests could be expected. Slavko **Stojanovic**, Director of the Police Department at the Montenegrin Interior Ministry, noted that the police cooperation was stepped up based on the protocol that had already been signed by the three countries. “We will not allow for destabilization of the region,” Stojanovic said, adding that joint police teams have the initial information that is important for repressive actions and prevention of crimes. Zoran **Mandic**, the Head of the Criminal Police Department at the RS Interior Ministry, said that there are no borders for criminals and structured criminal groups, so the real reasons for the murder in Serbia could lie in Montenegro, and the killers could be in the RS. That is why it is important that there are no obstacles and borders in police cooperation either, Mandic concluded.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Kosovo Constitution Still Challenged in North (*BIRN*, by Edona Peci, 10 April 2014)**

Six years after Kosovo's independence constitution came into force, authorities in Pristina are still struggling to implement it in the Serb-run north of the country.

Kosovo President Atifete Jahjaga said the country’s “constitutionality and legality encompasses the whole of its territory, a country with functional and democratic institutions, based on all-inclusiveness.

“We have gone through the difficult process of institutional consolidation, aiming with understanding to guarantee the rights of each community, especially those of the Serbian community in the northern part of our country, rights which are ingrained in our Constitution,” Jahjaga told a ceremony marking the sixth anniversary of the constitution.

Kosovo’s highest legal act went into force two months after the country declared independence from Serbia in February of 2008, which Serbia still refuses to recognize.

Last April, however, Pristina and Belgrade reached an agreement on normalizing relations, designed to assist the integration of both countries into the EU.

The deal envisions the formation in the north of an Association of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo with broad powers, which will include the four Serb-run northern municipalities of North Mitrovica, Leposavic, Zvecan and Zubin Potok.

Hashim Thaci, the Kosovo Prime Minister, said the government had “established its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the whole territory of Kosovo”.

This was “guaranteed by setting police officers at all border crossing points, those in Jarinje and Brnjak [in the north] included”, he said.

Since the end of the Kosovo conflict in the late 1990s, northern Kosovo had been beyond the Pristina government’s control, while Serbia continued to finance local security, judicial, health and educational institutions.

According to the EU-mediated deal, Belgrade must dissolve all so-called parallel structures in health, education, police and courts and the local governments that it has installed in the north.

Last year, following the deal, Serbs in the north for the first time participated in local elections organized by the Kosovo authorities and elected new mayors.

Shpend Kursani, a political analyst, said there was still along way to go. “The constitution... in practice is not implemented in the whole of the territory”, he said.

Courts, customs and other bodies in the north did not use Kosovo's own state symbols, he noted, among other points.

**Kosovo adds two more friendlies despite Serbian opposition (*Inside World Football*, by Andrew Warshaw, 10 April 2014)**

April 10 - Despite continuing consternation by Serbia, Kosovo has broken yet new ground by arranging two more friendlies as it takes advantage of its new found status approved by FIFA.

Last month, Kosovo played its first senior international since declaring independence from Serbia six years ago, a 0-0 draw with Haiti in front of 17,000 fans in Mitrovica.

Kosovo is not recognised by Serbia and is not a member of FIFA or the United Nations but is supported by about 100 countries and earlier this year FIFA finally cleared the national team and clubs to play non-competitive matches, with certain conditions, after a lengthy battle for recognition.

Now INSIDEworldfootball has learned that the KFF recently announced two follow-up fixtures, against Turkey at home on May 21 at an as yet undecided venue and on neutral ground in Geneva against Senegal four days later.

The two friendlies represent another indication of Kosovo's gradual acceptance into the international football family.

Whilst there is a long way to go before they become fully-fledged members of either FIFA or UEFA - the latter adopting a far more cautious approach than the former - their ultimate objective is to play World Cup and European Championship qualifiers.

Turkey and Senegal will provide far stiffer opposition than Haiti, just the kind of test Kosovan football needs as it builds towards greater recognition. But exactly what the Serbs will make of this is another question.

Serbia's football authorities this week gave the biggest hint to date that they will challenge the breakaway territory's sudden partial emergence on the world footballing stage.

Belgrade still lays formal claim to Kosovo and the Serbian FA have made it clear they are opposed to FIFA's stance even though they were apparently involved in the original highly sensitive talks over Kosovan football's future.

**Serbia, WWI, and the question of guilt (*DW.de*, 10 April 2014)**

When it comes to World War I, Serbia sees itself as both a victor and a victim - but not as a culprit. The country considers any blame placed on it to be a distortion of facts. DW takes a look.

It is June 28, 1914. A young man is sitting inside a cafe in Sarajevo, the capital of Austro-Hungarian-ruled Bosnia. Under his coat he clutches a pistol. He has come here to end the life of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne.

Suddenly, the royal party arrives. The young man doesn't hesitate and shoots both Ferdinand and his wife. The assassin is Gavrilo Princip, a 19-year-old Serbian student. He obtained the weapon from a secret military society known as Black Hand, which was out to create a greater Serbia. But, as it turns out, that goal diverged from Princip's original aspirations.

As a member of the Young Bosnia revolutionary organization, Princip strove for liberation from Austro-Hungarian rule and the creation of a state of united South Slavic countries, i.e., Yugoslavia. To this day, he is revered in Serbia as a national hero - and viewed as a terrorist elsewhere.

"What provided the spark for his bullets?" asked Serbian writer and historian Vladimir Pistalo: "It was because Princip had no influence on who ruled his country." For Princip, in other words, Franz Ferdinand was simply a tyrant. Following the assassination, Austria-Hugary presented the Serbian government with an ultimatum; 37 days later, World War I had broken out.

Conflicting perspectives

So, who is to blame? This remains the most crucial question in Serbia as this year's centenary draws nearer. The debate is flooding Serbian media. Was it the "war-thirsty Teutons" - i.e.,Germans and Austrians - as the official Serbian version tells it? Or was all of Europe simply a giant powder keg waiting to blow? That the keg was ignited by a Serb, does this make the Serbian nation guilty, as some historians suggest?

Not at all, according to Serbian history textbooks. "After being unified in 1871, Germany was in a strong economic position. The military leadership in Berlin demanded a shift of power and colonial wealth," claims one standard account. It goes on to say that the central powers were simply waiting for an excuse to mobilize their troops.

Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic recently commented on the issue. He told the Belgrade daily Politika that attempts were being made to place blame on Serbia, to hold it responsible for triggering global-scale tragedies.

A circle of Serbian intellectuals that include world-famous filmmaker Emir Kusturica are even demanding that the "unlawful" trial against Princip be annulled. And the first monument dedicated to Princip is being erected in a central park in Belgrade to mark the anniversary of the outbreak of the war.

A tragic victory

"The Hero of 1914" is the title of a new Serbian documentary by author and journalist Filip Svarm. It is not about Gavrilo Princip or the top politicians and officers of the time. The "hero" is embodied by Serbia's farmers, who made up close to 80 percent of the Serbian army. According to Svarm, the film is an attempt to put the "ordinary man" in the limelight, the Serbian farmer whose priority it was to protect his family, his property and his way of life.

A quarter of Serbia's 4.5 million residents died in World War I. Most perished in combat, while 400,000 others died of typhoid, cold or hunger. German, Bulgarian and Austro-Hungarian occupying forces executed around 60,000 Serbian civilians. This is one of the reasons why, according to Svarm, it is "unreasonable" to hold Serbia responsible. "Serbia was a victim of war - a testing ground for the power struggles between the great powers," he said.

Many Serbians still see their country as a kind of eternal victim, a target of "Germanic hatred" that manifested itself later in the Second World War and the Yugoslav Wars and continues today. This view was recently illustrated by the "Vreme" magazine, which published a previously unreleased photo of Adolf Hitler gazing at a present he received for his 52nd birthday in 1941. It was a commemorative plate, confiscated by the Wehrmacht in Sarajevo, bearing the inscription, "On this historic square, Gavrilo Princip proclaimed freedom."

DW.DE

**Is EU Ready To Change Approach toward Bosnia and Herzegovina? (*EUinside*, by Adelina Marini, 9 April 2014)**

In the beginning of February, Bosnia and Herzegovina reminded of itself again and seriously worried, especially its neighbours which, with terror, recalled the bloody wars that accompanied the break-up of former Yugoslavia in the beginning of the 1990s. The mass protests that erupted across the federal state raised many issues the most crucial of which are two: has the EU not abandoned Bosnia and Herzegovina letting it float down the river of the process of association with the EU with a receding instead of closing up perspective for start of negotiations. Is the state construction of Bosnia and Herzegovina still valid, is the second question, especially against the backdrop of the unresolved with years problems that have accumulated precisely because of the difficult architecture agreed after painful negotiations in Dayton in the 1990s.

Alas, because of the crisis with Ukraine, the EU has failed to pay the necessary attention to the issue apart from discussing the situation during a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Union on February 10th. Bosnia, however, is not forgotten by its former mates from Yugoslavia - Croatia and Slovenia. The Croatian foreign ministry has developed a proposal for consultations on a change of the approach toward BiH. According to Vesna Pusic, first deputy prime minister and minister of foreign and European affairs, an innovation is needed in the process of enlargement, especially in terms of Bosnia and Herzegovina to enable the country move out of the current deadlock.

In the proposal, it is pointed out that the events in BiH cause serious concern and demand direct intervention by EU. "The European perspective is still supported by most citizens of the BiH as a common denominator and it is seen as the only tool for steering the country in the right direction. Therefore the immediate action of the EU institutions and member states is necessary", is written in the Croatian concept. It circles around the provision of a status of a special candidate country to BiH because the beginning of accession negotiations will allow the country to mobilise the internal democratic forces to implement the reforms which the EU requires now as a precondition to start accession negotiations.

The fundamental logic behind a new approach of the EU toward the country should be a proposal for membership, but upon one condition: the pace and progress of the Bosnian integration in the EU to be bound with the pace and progress of the internal political and administrative efficiency. Zagreb sees a possibility this new approach to be applied as early as October when there will be elections in BiH and there will be new governments. The proposal sees the process in two stages. The first is a pre-accession one and precedes the definition of the negotiations framework, while the second is the very process of negotiations itself. Croatia sees the first stage as a form of special preliminary screening or inventory of the constitutional and administrative systems of BiH with a view of defining the tasks for establishment of joint central institutions which are key to the efficient negotiations with the Commission.

This phase foresees the so long awaited by the Commission constitutional reforms, amendments to the electoral law and application of the ruling of the European Court on Human Rights on the Sejdic-Finci case. Those are issues which are usually being resolved in the negotiations on chapters 23 and 24, but in the BiH case this could be part of a broader process that clearly leads toward European membership, according to the Croatian vision. "The Commission has already been very successful in adapting its negotiations’ methodology in the case of Croatia which, based on some previous experience, negotiated under different requirements and rules from the countries that joined earlier. That model was additionally modified for Montenegro. Finally, in the case of Serbia, normalisation of the relations with Kosovo was not treated as a prerequisite for starting the EU accession negotiations, but as an ongoing process that will be finalised together with the negotiations process itself. That approach opened the way for finding a solution to that problem and normalisation of relations, together with setting Serbia on the EU path", says the Croatian non-paper, pointing out that this approach could prove as successful for BiH, too.

Croatia also believes that the EU should pay serious attention on the country's economic instability because of which, as the proposal reads, the society in the country is more and more divided and polarised. It is important the EU to ensure funding for the pre-accession programme IPA in a combination with bilateral aid assistance. Funding should be targeted to specific projects which could have tangible effect on stabilisation, social inclusion and the economic development of the country. The budget of IPA in 2013 was 47 million euros, mainly allocated for building of institutions and administrative capacity. According to Croatia, though, the programme should be complemented by bilateral assistance aimed at supporting national institutions but with a major focus on non-governmental organisations in order to establish "a well-informed and proactive civil society scene that would assist in the gradual transformation of BiH society", says the Croatian proposal.

During her visit in Sarajevo in March, Ms Pusic noted that the non-governmental organisations have a huge potential which she had not paid attention to before. There is political will in the country for work with NGOs. But is there strength, is another matter, she said after her meetings during which she presented the Croatian initiative and got unanimous support. At this stage, though, it is more important if the EU is ready to think about a new approach. According to Ms Pusic, on this issue, the division in the Council is into relatively three groups. Some of the countries are strongly enthusiastic with the idea which was already discussed in the Foreign Affairs Council, but without conclusions. The second group are countries which have reserves and the third group is of neutral countries. In order for the initiative to be successful, however, it needs to turn into a common European one, Ms Pusic believes.

One of the countries that supports enthusiastically the Croatian initiative is Slovenia. The country's Foreign Minister Karl Erjavec has an initiative of his own on the matter - a petition which he sent in February to baroness Catherine Ashton. The purpose of the petition is to push the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina up on the EU agenda. In spite of its own initiative, Slovenia does support any ideas which could help improve the situation in BiH. Responding to questions by euinside via e-mail, the Slovene foreign ministry points out that the EU should commit to BiH at the highest political level. The EU should be a facilitator, not a decision-maker.

Slovenia, too, sees the process in two stages. The first package of measures are short-term which can immediately be launched, even before the elections. They should be aimed at the immediate concerns of the citizens - economic, social and the perspectives for the young people. The second package is of long-term measures which could be complemented by what the Croatian side proposes. The main aim should be modernisation of the country and the implementation of constitutional changes. Slovenia is against any changes in the territorial construction of BiH, but admits that work is needed on the system for decision-making in the country and the functioning of the administrative system.

Euinside sought the position of Slovakia, too, whose Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajcak is very closely committed to the development of the Western Balkans and their European integration. But, for now, Bratislava is refraining from commenting on the Croatian initiative until the next Foreign Affairs Council which will take place on April 14-15. Then the ministers may adopt conclusions on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Vesna Pusic believes, however, that in order for the initiative to be successful it should be supported by the big EU members and not simply be supported but apprehended as their own. Moreover, Croatia does not insist on the ownership of the initiative and is ready to support any text if it is common European one and if it is aimed at restarting the European integration process and forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The future of the country is one of the main topics on the agenda of the Croatian society. MEPs from all political groups are actively engaged in the search of a solution at European level. Croatia's President Ivo Josipovic, too, firmly stands behind the initiative. He said in Sarajevo yesterday that the most important thing for BiH is to start the European integration which will mark the beginning and the solution of the internal political and economic problems. "There is no better direction for the integration of the countries from South-Eastern Europe than a membership in the EU", the Croatian head of state said.

The Croatian initiative deserves admirations and should be supported because in the past years it has become clear that the EU enlargement strategy is not sufficiently adequate to secure the desired outcome. Bosnia has already demonstrated how dangerous a deadlock can be. What Zagreb actually offers is an upgrade of the high level dialogue Stefan Fule, the enlargement commissioner, launched a few years ago. However, that dialogue was left entirely without the commitment of the member states. Croatia wants this to change. Ukraine cannot be used as an excuse because there will always be an immediate big problem to be resolved - be it the eurozone crisis, the drafting of the Lisbon treaty or the handling of the Ukrainian crisis.

This should not be a reason not to pay attention to all the other problems which might not be evolving into crises but are small smouldering hearths. It is very important the Foreign Affairs Council to come up with specific conclusions so that immediate work on the change of approach with Bosnia and Herzegovina can begin before the end of this mandate of the European Commission. Moreover, both Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are completely aware that a possible new approach does not mean lowering the criteria for accession. On the contrary.

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