

SARAJEVO

Another Attempt at Deal on Government Fails



Leaders of Bosniak and Croat parties that will make the entity government in the Federation didn't meet in Sarajevo to negotiate ministerial positions, as announced earlier.

The finance ministry is still coveted by Croat HDZ and Bosniak DF

After a semiformal meeting with HDZ leader Dragan Covic and Damir Becirovic of the Democratic Front, the leader of SDA Bakir Izetbegovic said that they are close to an agreement on the Federation's government.

"We are very close to the solution. I cannot say more. I hope we will finish everything tomorrow or the day after that," Izetbegovic said yesterday.

Leaders of SDA, HDZ and the DF were

supposed to meet yesterday in the BiH Presidency building to negotiate the distribution of ministerial positions in the Federation's government.

HDZ leader Dragan Covic said that he still insists on the entity's finance ministry. He added that it is difficult to talk about the distribution of ministries as the situation is "hazy".

"We need to clarify everything so there would be no false promises.

There can be no more agreements under the table; we have to put them on the table," said Covic.

HDZ eyes six ministries in the Federation's government, out of 16. The Democratic Front wants the same number of ministries. Both parties also want the finance ministry. It is speculated that SDA's Izetbegovic will try to mediate between HDZ and DF at a meeting that is supposed to be held today.



Denis Zvizdic, new BiH CoM chairman: We don't have the names of all ministers yet, but I believe we will by the end of this week. There are intensive ongoing talks with the parties in the parliamentary majority that will have ministers in the Council



Mehmed Agovic, advisor to BiH minister of transport and communications: The first step of new BiH Ministers Council should be unblocking (the digitalization of public broadcasters) and installation of purchased digitalization equipment



Igor Luksic, Montenegrin foreign minister: BiH outgoing foreign minister Zlatko Lagumdzija used to say that the problem of Montenegro and BiH is that they have no problems. I hope that didn't motivate anybody to make a problem (with Sutorina)

Cantons Say Sarajevo Gets Too Much Cash

Several cantons in the Federation are challenging the current distribution of tax revenues, which they say gives too much money to the capital, reports BIRN

One of Federation's ten cantons is launching a initiative, challenging the regulations on distributing tax money in the entity, to establish what its says is a fairer distribution of public revenues.

The Federation has ten cantons, several of which complain that the current system allocates too much money to the Canton of Sarajevo, home to the capital city. Officials from several cantons told Balkan Insight that want changes to the law on the distribution of VAT revenues, which make up a key part of the budgets of all levels of government in Bosnia.

Jasmin Duvnjak, vice-president of Zenica-Doboj Canton's assembly, said his canton would be renewing its initiative to change the law, which it already sent to the Federation's parliament two years ago.

"We are not satisfied that this problem has not yet been solved. The current law is unjust, discriminatory, economically unsustainable and unacceptable," Duvnjak said. The current distribution of tax revenues is based on several parameters, such as the population of the canton, number of its pupils, and its overall expenses. Some officials say other criteria, including the canton's industrial production, should also be included among the parameters. Duvnjak stressed that much of the country's industry is based in the Zenica-Doboj and Tuzla cantons, which generate more income for the country than Sarajevo Canton.

"We have a situation in which the cantons that produce the most get the least in return," he maintained.

Duvnjak said it was understandable for Sarajevo Canton, as the seat of the capital and the national administrative center, to be privileged position to a point, but it was currently above what could be considered fair. Sarajevo Canton currently gets some 355 million KM a year from the Federation's government. Tuzla receives around 104 million euro while Zenica-Doboj gets less.

The distribution of tax revenue to the cantons has been increasingly challenged by the cantons and is a hot topic, given the deep economic and social challenges expected in 2015. Federation's finance minister Ante Krajinina recently told FTV that while the distribution of public revenues to lower levels of governments, including the cantons and the municipalities, might not be fair, it would be complicated to change them.

"Until we have the official results of the census, that process in fact makes no sense, and there is also no consensus on changing the law on public revenue," Krajinina said.

Bosnia and Herzegovina still uses the results of the 1991 census in its laws. The results of the first census held in 22 years, in October 2013, have not been published yet. Duvnjak said his canton would not be backing down.

"I do not expect this to be solved overnight, but this social discrimination has to end," he said.

Tax Authority Says It Will Sue Lawmaker for Slander

The Indirect Taxation Authority said it will press charges against a member in the BiH Parliament, Aleksandra Pandurevic, because of her allegations of criminal activities in the Authority. Pandurevic said that embezzlement practice "obviously established earlier in the ITA, continued after the departure of (ITA head) Kemal Causevic."

"The persons are the same, only the director changed," she said, commenting on the construction of a border crossing at Gradiska.

"This incorrect information aims at discrediting the reputation of ITA and minimization of its work by presenting this

Authority as a criminal institution. Accusations against the ITA for the purposes of daily political conflicts between members of different political parties, as well as for personal promotion of lawmakers have immense adverse effects and damage the reputation of the ITA and its employees, which could result in a negative impact on the results of the ITA," the Authority said. ITA said that its actions in connection with the construction of border crossing point Gradiska were undertaken in accordance with the Decision of the Council of Ministers on the capital investment.

DAILY MARKERS

By Amra Zimic
Editor-in-Chief

Dead Money

Total household savings in BiH amounted to about 8.5 billion KM last year. This continued a trend of rise, although the savings in banks are essentially the worst way to preserve the value of money. Regardless the interest, that money constantly loses its value due to inflation. However, citizens don't have the feeling, skills and knowledge to start what keeps the money better, even multiplies it. And that is investing in new, own business. There are at least two reasons. The first one is a consequence of the general economic downturn in BiH. But, the second one is perhaps more important. BiH pays the price of lack of business inventiveness that was mentally inherited from the socialist past.

Former economy was based on large state-owned companies. Personal business initiative was discouraged. Therefore, people who are older than fifty today know almost nothing about business. It is logical that they couldn't educate their children about that.

Still, some people in BiH have successful private businesses. They built real business empires. But the lack of small businesses, usually family-owned, with four to five employees, is evident in BiH. Such businesses don't require big initial investments. Many people have the money, but they do not dare to invest in their own project.

One of the reasons for that is the lack of education of citizens in that department, in the market-economy improvement of their worldview. Every government should, essentially, create a team of experts that would come up with typical small programs for starting small businesses which don't require more than 40-50 thousand KM of initial investment. In that way, the dead domestic money, deposited in banks with low interest, would significantly revive the BiH economy and create steady paid jobs for many people. Unfortunately, there was no recorded case of a government or municipality in BiH that gave directions to its citizens like that; the citizens who, as it turns out, have billions in bank accounts.

Waiting for Fatalities

This happens too: a mass fight in central Sarajevo, in Ferhadija, spiced with pyrotechnics, which never happened according to the Sarajevo Canton's Interior Ministry. Because nobody reported it

A video of the fight became viral, but judging by the experience, it is more likely that the police will storm the offices of a news website, in search of the original video, than tackle the deteriorating security situation in the Bosnian capital. Comparisons with New York or Rio de Janeiro can't be justified anymore: there is no day in Sarajevo without a shooting; there is no night when the streets aren't turned into racing tracks; it became normal that a 26-year-old man is executed mafia style in broad daylight. What became of this place?

The director of State Investigation and Protection Agency, Goran Zubac, was sentenced in first instance to a year in jail for negligent work. He remains the director until the second instance verdict. The independent board of the state parliament, packed by loyal party members, will wait for the second instance verdict before

deciding whether to dismiss Zubac. And to be honest, had Milorad Dodik managed to squeeze his SNSD in the state-level government, Zubac would likely be awarded with another term in the office, and the independent board would applaud.

The judiciary is reeling from a scandal: a judge of the state court was first arrested, and then held in a month-long custody. Azra Miletic is suspected of taking 100,000 KM in bribe, but the prosecutor said in the first hearing that the judge never took the money. She intended to. To be clear, when it comes to judges, politicians, police and prosecutors, I am all for punishment even for thinking about taking money. How will the case of judge Miletic end? Risking to be criticized by the HJPC, I am skeptic. And here is why: the court council always has three member judges, and even if judge Miletic decided to take money and annul verdict, I wonder what did the other two members do? Where they interviewed, being important witnesses, or is BiH Court so deep in the phase of slacking that only one judge in the council does the job, and the remaining two are extras? My skepticism is fed by BiH Court's practice that eludes even lawyers and judges, since it changes according to the political situation; for

example, some convicted war criminals whose sentences were suspended were released, while others remained in jail, and there is nobody to prosecute prosecutors. If there was, prosecutor Diana Kajmakovic would at least be scolded for planting evidence, which everybody saw on television, in that video from the government building in Mostar, at the time of Zivko Budimir case.

What can an average Sarajevan hope for, on the street, taking a walk, or at home, living in the city where the rule of law is convicted Goran Zubac, suspect Azra Miletic, and legally untouchable Diana Kajmakovic? Can street shootings be a surprise with such security-judiciary apparatus? Mafia executions became daily thing: the afternoon murder of Adnan Salcin, 26-year-old son of wartime hero Ramiz Salcin, was extensively

**By Vildana Selimbegovic
Oslobodjenje, Sarajevo**

covered in the media because of his family background, rather than the fact that the man rolled down the window of his car at an intersection and got killed in broad daylight. The murderers already have excuses - Salcin owed money, he was in murky business, he had problems with drug dealers...

Yet, nobody says who the drug dealers in Sarajevo are, and where did the drugs come from. More precisely, drugs are not a topic since Diana Kajmakovic questioned Naser Kelmendi in court, with open respect and admiration, days before Kelmendi will be out of reach of SIPA, and on the American black list as a European drug lord. Kelmendi is safe, in a Pristina jail, but he would probably sleep better if he was tried in Bosnia.

After all, who was ever nabbed by Bosnian police and jailed by Bosnian judiciary? The murderers of Taib Torlakovic? Dragan Covic? Kemal Causevic? The attackers of members of the securities commission? People who steal and attack cars of prominent company directors?

What do the local police do? Believe it or not, the Sarajevo Canton police union had a meeting the other day - at least according to the press release - to say whom they wanted to be their minister. They must think that was their job and their biggest concern. And what about fights in Ferhadija? Well, there were no fatalities (yet).

❖ Speaker of the BiH Parliament's House of Peoples Bariša Colak talked to Ambassador of Iran to BiH Seyed Hossein Rajabi about political situation and possibilities of improving economic cooperation between the two countries. Assessing that cooperation between state parliaments can contribute to improvement of relations between BiH and Iran, Ambassador Rajabi said he is convinced that position of Iran in Non-Aligned Movement, which that country presides, and the fact that Assembly of the Islamic Conference Organization is situated in Iran, could be used for better positioning of BiH in those international organizations.

❖ Minister of Foreign Affairs of BiH Zlatko Lagumdžija will meet today with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia Edgars Rinkevics in Sarajevo. Latvia is currently presiding over the Council of the European Union.

❖ 46 victims of genocide committed in Srebrenica in July 1995 were identified this year in the Podrinje Identification Project in Tuzla, and they will be buried in Potocari on July 11.

❖ The presentation of activities of the institutions, NGOs and other institutions in connection to reacting to natural disasters in gender context with accent on last year's floods in BiH was the goal of a session "Gender and natural disasters" which was organized yesterday by the Commission for Gender Equality of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH with the support of the Agency for Gender Equality in BiH and the OSCE Mission in BiH.

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Japan Grants over 600,000 KM to Five Health Care Centers Severely Damaged by Last Year's Floods

The Government of Japan decided to grant 317,582 Euros to 5 health care centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina that sustained severe damage in last year's floods

Recipients of the grants are Health Care Centre Maglaj, Health Care Centre Doboj, Health Care Centre Samac, Health Care Centre Domaljevac-Samac and Health Care Centre Sekovici. Ambassador of Japan to Bosnia and Herzegovina Hideo Yamazaki signed grant contracts with Directors of the five Health Care Centers at a ceremony that was held at the Embassy of Japan in Sarajevo.

Health Care Centers in Maglaj, Doboj and Samac will receive each up to 77,869 Euros for procurement of multi-purpose X-ray apparatus that will replace old X-ray equipment. The Government of Japan will provide a grant amounting to 42,642 Euros to Health Care Centre in Domaljevac-Samac for provision of ultrasound apparatus and laboratory equipment. Health Care Centre Sekovici will receive a grant amounting to 41,333 Euros that will be utilized for procurement of a new ambulance vehicle.

All of the health care centers and their medical equipment were severely damaged by



Financing for the five projects is part of the 5 million Euros of post-flood assistance that Japan pledged at the donors conference held in July 2014. Ambassador Cormack to Visit Srebrenica

floods that occurred in May 2014.

Financing for these five projects is part of the 5 million Euros of post-flood assistance that Japan pledged at the donors conference held in July 2014. Japanese Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina has mobilized all possible instruments and assistance schemes to support the recovery and recon-

struction of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Government of Japan attaches great importance to health sector projects. Since 1996, almost 50 million Euros has been granted for improvement of medical equipment or provision on ambulance vehicles in primary health care institutions across this country.

Ambassador Cormack to Visit Srebrenica

U.S. Ambassador to BiH Maureen Cormack will visit Srebrenica and Potocari today. Upon her arrival to Potocari, the Ambassador will visit the Srebrenica Potocari Memorial Center to pay respects to the victims. Ambassador

Cormack is scheduled to meet with Srebrenica municipality officials, representatives of the Mothers of Srebrenica and local NGO's. Ambassador Cormack also plans to visit the Srebrenica Primary School.

Ambassador of Kuwait Visits SIPA

Ambassador of Kuwait to Bosnia and Herzegovina Nasser Riden Thamer Almotairi visited the State Investigation and Protection Agency) and met with director Goran Zubac. They discussed aspects of the work of SIPA, its competences and its role in the security system of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also discussed the current security situation in the country.

Zubac stressed that the priorities of SIPA are fight against terrorism and terrorist financing, with particular emphasis on proactive and preventive actions, organized crime, financial crime and corruption, and war crimes. He informed Ambassador of Kuwait of the fact that SIPA has established a special team to combat terrorism, which works closely with partner agencies in BiH, the region and beyond, SIPA stated.

EUFOR Gender Conference to Mark International Women's Day

EUFOR will hold a conference titled "Efficient Security Sectors include women at all levels" on Thursday, in the Army Hall, Sarajevo. The conference will be opened by COM EUFOR Major General Johann Luif.

The conference will serve to mark International Women's Day and to foster gender awareness and gender mainstreaming in the area of operations. It will do this by focusing on the local security sector in particular, and by highlighting the importance of equal participation by

women in the security sector and the benefit such an approach brings to BiH society and to future integration with the EU. The conference will provide an opportunity for representatives of the BiH political and security sectors to discuss firsthand the wide variety of issues and challenges that women face, in terms of equal participation in these sectors, and ways of overcoming them.

The organizer of the conference is Nikolina Marceta, Gender Advisor of EUFOR.

Rule of Law Is Key to Accounting for the Missing



Upholding the rule of law is key to sustaining the effort to account for the missing in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the country approaches the 20th anniversary of the end of the war, participants at a roundtable in Tuzla agreed

The roundtable, organized by the International Commission on Missing Persons, brought together representatives of family associations and the authorities as well as academic and legal experts to discuss ways of increasing the effectiveness of efforts to account for the missing.

Participants noted that prosecuting war criminals and searching

for their victims is not something that affects just families of the missing; it affects everyone, because if criminals walk free, citizens cannot rely on the protection of the law, and - in practical terms - if criminals walk free they will not be obliged to give up whatever information they may possess regarding the fate of those who are still missing.

Discussion at the roundtable revolved around the findings presented in the BiH Stocktaking Report published by ICMP in December, which describes two decades of efforts to account for the missing and examines specific issues in Lower Podrinje, Upper Podrinje, Herzegovina, Sarajevo, Posavina, Central Bosnia, Northeast Bosnia and Western Bosnia.

The Stocktaking Report includes the following recommendations: Bosnia and Herzegovina must sustain the effort to account for the remaining 8,000 persons missing from the conflict by ensuring that its institutions, including the Missing Persons Institute and the BiH Prosecutor's Office remain strong and engaged; BiH must fully implement the Law on Missing Persons, which provides for the Central Records on Missing Persons, as well as for a Fund benefiting the families of the missing; BiH should explore new approaches to locating gravesites, including aerial and satellite imagery; The ongoing effort of systematically reassessing past processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina's mortuaries should be continued as a priority; Associations of family members of missing persons should continue their lobbying efforts to claim their rights to truth and justice. In particular they should continue to convene annual Regional Conferences to advocate for their rights and to ensure that progress is sustained in the future; BiH must strengthen its domestic capacity in terms of forensic expertise; among other things, an Institute of Legal Medicine should be established in the FBIH, and the capacities of the RS Institute of Forensic Medicine should be strengthened; Obstruction must end in regard to concluding bilateral agreements between Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries in the region, and in regard to the establishment of a Regional List of Missing Persons that would eliminate duplicate records and jurisdictional impediments to progress on the issue.

Further roundtables will be organized in Mostar on 17 March, in Sarajevo on 19 March, and in Banja Luka on 26 March.



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Reconstruction of Mostar's Orthodox Cathedral Resumes

Following a long break, works on the reconstruction of the Orthodox Cathedral in Mostar have resumed

Serb Orthodox Church rector in Mostar, Srđan Radičević, said the finishing works are underway on the dome above the altar, and that the plan is to continue building the belfry and the main dome soon. Radičević says that some 3 million KM is needed to finish the construction. He hopes the new government at the Federation and BiH Council of Ministers will help to continue the reconstruction.

Radičević said that not a single house of a Serb family was repaired in Mostar over the last several years, although there is interest

among Serb refugees and displaces persons to return to the city.

"We place high hopes in the regional conference, which took place in Sarajevo, and believe that the new ministers for refugees and displaces persons will give a fresh boost to the reconstruction of houses in Mostar."

The biggest problems faced by the returnees are unemployment and ways to survive.

"We've had some support in the repair of the Cathedral, but we aren't happy with the number of Serbs employed in the institutions of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton

and the (Federation) entity level," says the Mostar rector.

The Orthodox Cathedral in Mostar was set on fire and razed during the Bosnian war, in 1992. The reconstruction began in 2008, but the works were slow due to the lack of funds. The Cathedral is a national monument and one of Mostar's landmarks.



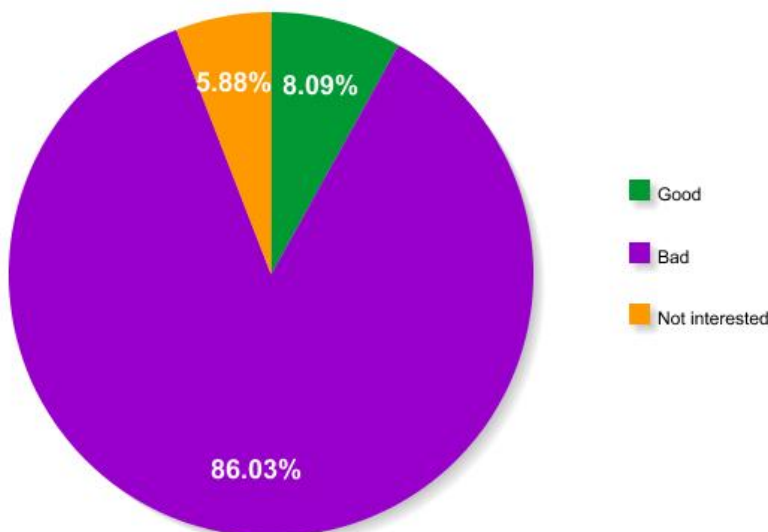
The reconstruction of Orthodox Cathedral in Mostar began in 2008

Trial of Five Former Bosnian Army Soldiers Accused of War Crime in Potoci Postponed

The trial of five former Bosnian Army fighters accused of committing crimes against civilians in Potoci, Mostar, has been postponed due to the absence of defendant Enes Curic. As a result, the trial chamber didn't enter the courtroom. A court assistant informed the defendants, their attorneys, and the prosecutor, that the hearing would not be held. Enes Curic, Ibrahim Demirovic, Samir Kreso, Habib Copelj, and Mehmed Kaminic have been charged with participating in the detention of Croat civilians, who were subjected to severe physical and mental abuse from June-December 1993. Demirovic is also charged with rape in Potoci.

According to the indictment, at the time Curic was a member of the 49th Mountain Brigade of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the manager of detention facilities in Potoci. Demirovic was the commander of the 47th Mountain Brigade of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Kreso was the chief of the Medical Unit of the Military Unit of the Mountain Brigade, which was active in the Bijelo Polje area. Copelj and Kaminic were members of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The trial will continue on March 17, BIRN reported.

The education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is...



Source: Radio Sarajevo

Bekto Precisa and Fischer Sports Sign Contract worth 26 Million Euros

High business delegation of the world-renowned brand Fischer Sports paid a visit to the Bosnian company Bekto Precisa. The result of previous good cooperation is a new contract signed with the general manager of the Bosnian company, Enisa Bekto, worth 26 million Euros

The contract will be implemented over the next six years, and the company Bekto Precisa points out that this is a significant investment which will allow capacity expansion and new jobs. That is the result of long and great cooperation and series of successfully implemented business deals between world-known brand Fischer Sport and Bekto Precisa. The investment is the result of extraordinary business relationship and trust between the owners of the two companies, but also top quality in the production of bindings for Fischer's skis and other components that are produced in Bekto Precisa for years.

Production is characterized by great responsibility because Fischer's products are intended for extreme sports, while emphasis is on every detail.

"The companies Bekto Precisa and Fischer have excellent cooperation in the development of sports industry for many years, and today we expand this cooperation with the new six-year contract worth 26 million," Enisa Bekto, General Manager of Bekto Precisa, told media.

The representatives of Fischer company confirmed that complete production will take place in the facilities of Bekto Precisa. "We are here today to expand the current collaboration with Bekto Precisa that so far,

in the last six years, has proven to be exceptional, so we make a new five to seven year contract. We are confident that production will be at the top level, that we will have no problems and that we will extend it not only to seven years, but to a much longer period. This contract will provide price, quality and deadlines," said Franz Resch, Director of Development of Fischer Sports.

Signing of a contract proves that representatives of Fischer Sports have plans to implement future large strategic projects with Bekto Precisa, due to high professionalism and reliability they have shown over the years of successful cooperation.

Reserves Grow, but There Is Lack of Good Projects

Banks in BiH hold the amounts of required reserves at the Central Bank above the prescribed level, because they cannot "engage" surplus of funds in the quality manner, the bankers say. According to them, on the other hand, the reserves make the banking sector very stable, while not being an aggravating factor in the business. According to a report on the maintenance of the required reserves of commercial banks at the Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina, last year the required reserves amounted to 1.401 billion KM, which is by 75.76 million KM more than in the same period in 2013.

"The basis for the calculation of the mandatory reserve at the end of 2014 increased by 792.72 million KM compared to the amount of the basis for the maintenance period at the end of 2013," the CBBH said, Nezavisne Novine reports.

"The calculation base consists of deposits and borrowed funds, regardless of the cur-

rency," the CBBiH said, and added that the required reserve ratio is 10 percent for short-term and seven percent for long-term deposits and borrowings. The last changes in the amount of required reserves were adopted when the reserve rate was reduced and borrowed funds from non-residents and the funds from government for development projects were excluded from the base. As they say, the extent to which the reserves guarantee the stability of the banking system in BiH is through the regulation of banks' liquidity.

"They ensure that banks hold a certain level of high quality and easily cashable funds at the Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina and that, as such, they contribute to the stability of the banking system", the CBBH said. As participants in the payment and members of national payment systems, banks hold some funds in the accounts at the CBBH they need to meet their daily needs

for settling payments.

"In terms of monetary strategy as in force in BiH, i.e. the currency board, required reserves in CBBH are the only and the main instrument of monetary policy," they said.

Ivan Vlaho, president of the Association of Banks in BiH and director of UniCredit Bank Mostar, says that, given the market situation, the current height of the required reserve is a record one.

According to him, most of the banks in BiH hold reserves on the account at the Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina above the statutory required level.

"Overall, I think that at this point required reserve cannot be an aggravating factor for any bank or any entity in the development of business or a 'brake' for the use of liquid assets," said Vlaho.

Radovan Bajic, director of NLB bank, said that keeping the required reserves above the prescribed means that the banks are liquid.

"The problem is not in the amount of the reserve, but in the ability of businesses and households to absorb free funds, that is, to allow financing of projects by banks and thus increase the value," said Bajic.

According to him, the banks cannot "engage" all the funds in a way that is implied by sound economic logic.

"The level of responsibility for credit funds should be raised, in order for the banks to have the opportunity to borrow abroad and the possibility to increase the level of deposit by stimulating interest," he said.

Turkey's Ziraat Bankasi Becomes 100% Owner of Bosnian Unit

Turkish bank Ziraat Bankasi has become full owner of its Bosnian unit, Ziraat Bank BH dd Sarajevo, data of the Sarajevo Stock Exchange indicated. Ziraat Bank BH shares worth a total of 24.3 million KM (\$13.8 million/12.4 million euro) changed hands in one

transaction on the secondary market on the Sarajevo Stock Exchange on March 4, stock exchange data indicated.

According to news portal Indikator.ba, prior to the transaction, which involved 1,920 Ziraat Bank BH shares, Ziraat Bankasi owned 68% of its Sarajevo-based unit.

Republika Srpska Office in Greece Closed "for Financial Reasons"



Citing financial reasons, the Republika Srpska government decided to close the entity's representation office in Thessaloniki, Greece

Following the government's decision, Republika Srpska president recalled the head of RS office in Thessaloniki, Vasilios Lampre.

The RS representation office in Thessaloniki opened in late August 2013. The opening ceremony attended by the RS president Milorad Dodik and prime minister Zeljka Cvijanovic.

President Dodik said back then that the office should work on making contacts in economy, education and culture, and organize humanitarian drives. He also spoke about the recent decision of enti-

ty's government to open representation offices in Thessaloniki and Washington. The RS president and prime minister held a meeting with representatives of the business community of the region, and they informed them about the economy of Republika Srpska. A significant interest was expressed in investments and contacts with relevant industrial capacities in Republika Srpska.

In addition to the now closed office in Greece, the RS has offices in the US, Belgium, Israel, Serbia, Germany and Austria.

According to the RS government's web-

site, the RS offices abroad should be financed with 4.5 million KM in 2015.

The RS government plans to open another office, this time in Italy, which was announced by the Minister of Economic Affairs and Regional Cooperation in the RS government, Zlatan Klokic. He also said that re-opening of the office in Greece is possible, but unlikely.

The money intended for the Greek office will most likely be transferred to the office in Italy.

This year's budget of the closed representation office in Greece was at 395,000 KM.

Former Yugoslav Republics Join Forces in Seeking Tombstone Protection

Officials from four former Yugoslav republics have expressed confidence that a joint bid to win United Nations protection for thousands of medieval tombstones will be successful. Known as Stecci, the tombstones date to the 12th century and feature decorative symbols and carvings.

Some 60,000 have been found in Bosnia, and almost 10,000 in Serbia, Croatia, and Montenegro.

Bosnian Civil Affairs Minister Sredoje Novic said: "We expect UNESCO to



Stecci tombstones at the town of Stolac, southern Herzegovina

add Stecci to the World Heritage List and place them under its protection."

He spoke at a ceremony in Sarajevo marking the completion of the formal nomination process, submitted to UNESCO in January after five years of joint work between the four countries torn apart by war in the 1990s.

Dubravko Lovrenovic, a Bosnian history professor and leader of the project, said the nomination is expected to be evaluated by mid-2016.

"We succeeded in showing that the South Slavic Balkans is not only the area of rivalries and destruction," he added.

Bosnia's Trailblazing Female Brigadier



Mersida Mesetovic is one of only two brigadiers in the Bosnian army but her 30-year career spanned the death of Yugoslavia

The remarkable wartime career of Bosnia's highest-ranking female army officer has "opened the door" to women wanting the military life in the Balkan country. Fifty-one-year-old Brigadier Mersida Mesetovic is one of the six percent of women who serve in the country's 16,000-strong armed forces. A veteran of the bitter 1992-1995 Bosnian War, Mesetovic - who earned the rank of brigadier in 2011 - spoke to The Anadolu Agency about her exceptional life and career, which has spanned the Yugoslav era up to the present day.

Women's Efforts during the War

Today, many modern armies encourage women to take an active role in peacekeeping missions in conflict zones around the world, in stark contrast to 30 years ago when women were not even part of an active-duty force. Now a senior official in Bosnia's defense ministry, Mesetovic's career started before the country's army even existed. Having studied "People's Defense" at the Faculty of Political Sciences in the former Yugoslav capital of Belgrade in 1987, Mesetovic was barred from front-line army duty simply because of her gender.

"At that time it was the only faculty which allowed women to become part of the defense system as reserve officers. Women did not take part in active duty in the former Yugoslav People's Army. After completing studies and military training, which was an integral part of the studies, females received the rank of reserve officer," Mesetovic tells AA.

Since beginning her career 30 years ago, Mesetovic - now a married mother-of-two - became one of only two female brigadiers in Bosnia's armed forces, only a single rank below that of colonel.

When Yugoslavia collapsed and war broke out in Bosnia in 1992, the national army dissolved and Mesetovic joined the newly-formed Bosnian army. It was with this force where she finally became a battle-hardened soldier, fighting on the front lines throughout the whole three-year war. After the warring parties signed the Dayton agreement to end the conflict in 1995, Bosnia was divided into two entities. Mesetovic took an active role in forming the new BiH Federation entity's army which was later integrated into today's Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mesetovic says that the discipline necessary in her profession became part of her private life.

"Training influences. When you spend eight hours at work, where you must be fully organized, where you must stay longer or come earlier, you simply must organize your life in a way which allows you to give everything to your private and professional life," she says.

Talking about the balance between men and women in the Bosnian army, Mesetovic says that, as in every other profession, there is antagonism between the two genders but that - through wartime experience - men grew accustomed to working with women "eventually."

"My generation [of women] which current-

ly takes part in the Armed Forces spent time with men in the war. Our male colleagues got used to us," she says.

After spending years together on the front lines, men adapted to the idea of female soldiers and today "there is no difference" in the army between them. Women's efforts during the war in Bosnia opened the door to a younger generation of girls who are becoming a part of today's army, Mesetovic thinks.

"In every new generation there is certain percentage of female colleagues. By struggling to be part of the system, to do our job professionally, to prove that we can do it well, we have opened the way for new generations of girls.

"Now it is a generally accepted fact that men and women serve jointly in our mission," she says.

Greater expectations

"If you want to be successful certainly you have to make much more efforts than your [male] colleagues do. You have to struggle for your place, which is definitely exhausting. And you have to find a way to organize yourself in order to be in top shape," Mesetovic says.

If women want others to look at them solely according to how professional they are then they must impose it, she believes.

"That's what we are looking for. To be recognized by the work we do and the quality of performing it," she says, adding: "Work demands nothing more than professionalism."

PINK REPORT 2014

Homophobic Attacks Intensified Last Year: Rights Watchdog



A Sarajevo-based civil society organization published its annual report on the state of human rights of LGBT people in Bosnia, according to which political instability hampers efforts to improve the position of disenfranchised minority in the country still plagued by intense homophobic sentiments

Sarajevo Open Center compiled its fourth Annual Pink Report, analyzing events that had impact on the state of LGBT rights in Bosnia in 2014. According to the 2014 Pink Report, political stagnation caused by the election campaign, post-election negotiations on government formation and political instability made it impossible to implement any relevant advocacy initiatives from the spring until the end of 2014, particularly where the amending of legislation or adoption of strategic documents were concerned. The 2014 election campaign, the programs of political parties and the processes in parliaments and governments have shown that the rights of LGBT people are politically irrelevant. Not a single party recognized this as a relevant problem. Also, governments and assemblies at different levels didn't have a single discussion on the rights of LGBT people.

Two Court Rulings

Stereotyping, medicalization, sexualization and secrecy were just as present in 2014 as methods of information manipulation in media reports about LGBT people and topics as they were in the 1990s and 2000s. Homosexuality remains a taboo in the media, and for that reason it is a source for scandals, shock and disbelief for tabloids. The only goal of such journalism is to entertain, not inform.

According to the Report, the Federation was not able to change the entity's Criminal Code, despite the fact that there were two initiatives in the parliament. The Criminal Code should be amended to incorporate provisions related to the criminal offenses of hate crimes and hate speech.

Strategic documents that would have recognized the state of the rights of LGBT people and offer solutions and measures for the improvement of the rights of LGBT people were not adopted. The Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH failed to draft a special report on the state of the rights of LGBT people. No other national documents, such as a strategy on combating discrimination or a strategy for improving the rights of LGBT people were never even discussed.

On the positive side, the Report claims that activism for the rights of LGBT people gained momentum. A network of existing organizations intensified their work, while there are a number of smaller groups of activists emerging across the country. A Banja Luka-based association of queer activists was registered in 2014, and implemented a number of campaigns. The Association LibertaMo is currently in the process of registration in Mostar, and the informal TANKA initiative is active in Tuzla.

In comparison to 2013, violence against LGBT people increased. LGBT individuals,

as well as LGBT activists, became the targets of more frequent attacks. The attack of a group of masked persons on the organizers and audience at the Merlinka film festival in Sarajevo was particularly well covered and documented. However, two court rulings were rendered in 2014 that confirmed the violation of the rights of LGBT people. A ruling of the BiH Constitutional Court confirmed that the right to assembly in public was violated in the case of the 2008 Queer Sarajevo Festival. This is the first ruling of the Constitutional Court on the rights of LGBT individuals in BiH.

No Indication of Attitude Change

Despite the articulated efforts and calls for concrete actions of civil society and international community, BiH authorities remain ignorant of the needs of a large segment of its population. At the moment there are no indications that this attitude of BiH authorities will change, all the while homophobia and transphobia remain a common experience in the government institutions.

The Pink Report is currently the only annual publication in BiH dedicated exclusively to covering the human rights of LGBT individuals. It is being published for the fourth year in a row. A copy of the full Report is available on the website of Sarajevo Open Center.

Sport Bridges Ethnic Divides



At a debate following the screening of an IWPR documentary in Sarajevo, speakers said the film showed how sport could help Bosnians overcome ethnic divisions

ILove SFK, which follows the ethnically mixed women's football club SFK 2000, was produced by IWPR and Mebius Film as part of the Tales of Transition project, funded by the Norwegian embassy in Sarajevo. At a discussion held after the February 25 screening, the film's director Ada Sokolovic said she had never liked football much until she saw SFK 2000 play. Now she is a huge fan. "I want to promote and motivate these girls," Sokolovic said. "They prove that boundaries exist only in people's minds. They are aware that only together can they achieve something, and that their strength comes from their unity."

Fighting on Several Fronts

The team's members come from all over Bosnia and include Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks. Proud of their close ties, SFK 2000 players say there are no ethnic tensions within the team. Their only goal is to play well and to achieve the best results possible in a country where women's football is still undervalued. For 12 years running, SFK 2000 has been a state champion in women's football, and 11 of its members play for Bosnia's national women's team.

Despite this success, they face many obstacles as women in a male-dominated sport. "If football players from some men's club had succeeded as much as these girls have, they would have received all the support they needed. But players from a female club have to struggle," Sokolovic said. Team coach Samira Hurem agreed.

"If we only had 30 per cent of the budget that the average men's football club gets, there would be no limits for us," she told the round table.

Team member Azra Numanovic said there had been times when she and her fellow players could not afford new football boots and had to mend their old ones with adhesive tape. Numanovic, a Bosniak from the eastern town of Zvornik, was born in 1990, two years before the war started. When Zvornik was taken over by Serb forces in 1992, she and her family had to leave. Before the war, 48 per cent of the town's population was Bosniak, but today it is predominantly Serb. Numanovic does not let the past influence her relationships with Serb teammates.

"We are fighting on several fronts here - we have to prove to everyone in Bosnia that we can play together regardless of our ethnic backgrounds, and on the other hand we must prove that we are good at this sport, which is traditionally male," she said.

Kristina Seslija, a Bosnian Serb, is the mother of two SFK 2000 players, Andjela and Varvara. Although they live in Bosnia's predominantly Serb entity of Republika Srpska, she has no problem letting her daughters travel regularly to Sarajevo to play.

She is proud her daughters can identify with the club and their teammates.

"The girls from this club could serve as an example to everyone in Bosnia," Seslija said.

"When we play against other teams and

some nationalist incident occurs, all the girls on the team raise their voice against it and protect the other girls. That doesn't happen so often in this country."

Message of Tolerance and Support

Seslija told the round table that she never tried to stop her daughters pursuing their dreams, even though many people had told her that football was not for girls and that they should choose a "more appropriate" sport.

"All the girls in this team are like my children. I'm so proud of them because they are really good people," Seslija said.

The audience reaction to the screening at Sarajevo's Cinema City was overwhelmingly positive.

"I Love SFK revealed many problems that today's Bosnian society has, but it also showed us how these problems can be overcome," said Dzenana Imamovic, a sports teacher.

"These girls are living proof that Bosnia could be a better place if we all worked together to achieve our goals, despite all the difficulties."

Mirela Geko from the Local Coalition against Hate: Ignore the Differences was also in the audience. She said she particularly liked the film's message of tolerance and support.

"This documentary promotes real values and shows us that sport can help us love each other regardless of our ethnic or religious background," she said.

WEATHER OUTLOOK



Sarajevo

Today: Partly cloudy. High 9C.

Tonight: Low -4C.

Thursday: Snow. Close to 3C.

Banja Luka

Today: Partly cloudy. High 14C.

Tonight: Low 3C.

Thursday: Sleet. Close to 4C.

Tuzla

Today: Partly cloudy. High 12C.

Tonight: Low 2C.

Thursday: Sleet. Close to 3C.

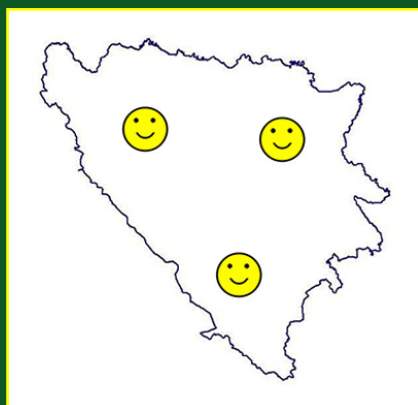
Mostar

Today: Partly cloudy. High 14C.

Tonight: Low 4C.

Thursday: Partly cloudy. Close to 13C.

BIO METEO



Air pollution in Sarajevo

MODERATE

UV Index

Low

GLOBE IN PICTURES



People watch a fight between male small-tail han sheep in Huxian, China



A photographer has captured images of stars swirling above the English countryside. Freelance photographer Matt Bigwood wanted to convey the movement of stars when he photographed the night sky over Gloucestershire. Using long exposures, Matt shot the same location multiple times, before layering the images on top of each other to create the star trails in the sky

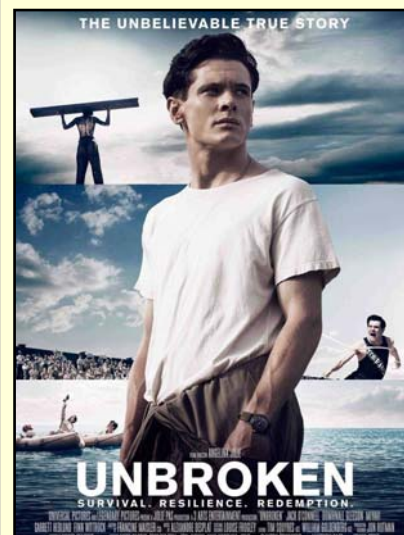


A Palestinian student prepares to fly her kite during a commemoration to mark the fourth anniversary of Japan's Tsunami organized by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip

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