

Foreign Press Office - Mostar

NEWS BULLETIN

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June 6 – 12, 2005

Bosnian Croat veterans, Croatian Government agree to deal on assistance

HINA, June 7, 2005

Representatives of the Croatian government and of associations of Croat war veterans and war victims in Bosnia-Herzegovina have agreed on the contents of an inter-state agreement regulating assistance which Croatia will give to about 13,500 members of the Croat Defense Council (HVO) [Bosnian Croat forces in 1992-95 war] and Croat veterans' and disabled civilians' associations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, said Andjelko Barun, the head of the Bosnian Croat war veterans' HVIDR-a association.

Barun told a news conference in Mostar that 13,500 Bosnian Croats would be entitled to pensions from Croatia and hospital treatment in Croatia. Children of Bosnian Croat war veterans, covered by this agreement, will be on equal footing as Croatian children in the process of enrolling in secondary schools and colleges in Croatia as well as in students' dormitories.

Barun added that the agreement should enter into effect on 1 January 2006 and until then the document should be officially signed and ratified by Croatia's and Bosnia's state parliaments.

Sarajevo: Jovic and Tihic meet Burns

FENA, June 7, 2005

Members of the BiH Presidency Ivo Miro Jovic and Sulejman Tihic, together with BiH Council of Ministers Chair Adnan Terzic and Foreign Affairs Minister Mladen Ivanic, met in Sarajevo today a US delegation led by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns, the BiH Presidency stated.

Jovic used the opportunity to thank the American people and Government for all they have done and continue to do for BiH. He also informed the US delegation about reform processes in BiH, especially in the field of defense.

Tihic again emphasized the good and friendly relations with USA and the need for their political, military and economic presence in BiH.

“I respect your foreign policy and this is why we shall continue to be present in your country, including our arrival to Srebrenica on July 11. When you capture Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic you will enter the avenue towards NATO. From Sarajevo we are heading for talks in Pristina and Belgrade”, Burns told BiH officials.

The two sides agreed that BiH, as a young country in the process of building a just peace, received great understanding and help of the US government.

Members of the BiH Presidency informed Ambassador Burns about the decision of the BiH Presidency on the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the Dayton Agreement, as well as the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the crime in Srebrenica.

For BiH to become a democratic, civic and developed society it needs to complete reform process, accelerate economic reconstruction, continue full cooperation with the ICTY, disrupt the network supporting indicted war criminals and open regional economic cooperation and trade without ethnic divisions, was concluded at the end of this friendly exchange of views in Sarajevo today, the BiH Presidency stated.

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Derventa: Rectory break-in

FENA, June 8, 2005

During the night between June 5 and 6, unidentified persons broke into the rectory in Bukovica near Derventa where they committed significant damages, says Pastor Ivan Juric

According to him, the vandals broke in through the main entrance, smashed the windows of the stockroom and in the main room. They also turned over the altar and shattered the statues of Saint Anthony and Our Lady. A cross was thrown into a corner of the room.

Pastor Juric points out that the attack was most likely carried out in order to intimidate Croat returnees. In the area of Bukovica there were 1200 Croats living before the war. Up until now, only one Croat has returned. After the rectory was renovated, 26 Croats registered to return to Bukovica.

International Community ignoring the needs of Croat returnees to RS

Vecernji list, June 8, 2005

During the first visit by Ivo Miro Jovic as Croat Member of the BiH Presidency to Plehan, an incident occurred clearly portraying that refugee return, especially to RS, is not a simple process. Before the eyes of the state delegation, Serb locals removed the power transformer from recently built electrical lines which were supposed to spur hope for more Croat returns to the Derventa region. The incident was witnessed by Deputy Minister for Human Rights and Refugees and President of the State Committee for Refugees and Displaced Persons Ivica Marinovic.

VL: What exactly happened in Plehan and what is your comment, as a person directly involved in the return process?

Marinovic: During President Jovic's recent visit to Plehan, Serbs cruelly removed the transformers from the recently built electricity distribution grid. Thus they demonstrated their power and sent a message to potential returnees – if we can do this in front of a BiH Presidency Member, can you imagine what we can do when he is not here. They did this with the approval of what we call the international community, which confirms their position towards Croat returnees. Croat returnees are left with the fact that they cannot plug in both their hairdryer and refrigerator at the same time so that they do not endanger the stability of the electricity grid. At the same time, President Cavic superficially calls for Croats to return to their homes in RS.

VL: Croat returns to RS are obviously a difficult and harsh process. It seems that no one, not even the government, can answer how to secure mass returns?

Marinovic: The answer to that question is being answered already by those who do not wish well and it is unfavorable for Croats in RS. Compared to pre-war figures of Croats living in the territory of today's RS, 95% are missing. That same area has seen the return of 145,000 Bosniaks, which is 33% of their pre-war population. These statistics illustrate that Serbs and Bosniaks in territories they consider their own allow returns according to a one-for-one principle. They have open support and assistance for these projects from the "international community." It is clear that everyone together, Serbs, Bosniaks, and the "international community," simply do not take us Croats into consideration and in their negotiations and activities act as if we do not exist.

VL: It also seems that Croat representatives in government bodies are not doing enough for Croat return to RS. Where do you see the solution for true Croat return to the smaller of the BiH entities?

Marinovic: We need to significantly strengthen the position of Croats within the Federation Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons. In order to revitalize Croats in RS, we need to formulate strong return programs to the Banja luka and Posavina regions. We also need to strengthen the constitutional and legal status of Croats in RS so that they can be equal in their full capacity.

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No funds for Kiseljak and Kresevo from SERDA

Slobodna Dalmacija, June 9, 2005

The initiative for the Sarajevo region as a single economic unit, arising from and supported by the international community in BiH, operates through project SERDA (Sarajevo Economic Regional Development Agency). The project includes Sarajevo Canton, City of East Sarajevo, twelve municipalities with a Bosniak majority, six municipalities with a Serb majority, and two with a Croat majority, Kresevo and Kiseljak. The question, however, remains whether they will remain a part of the project.

“Kiseljak municipality practically receives no benefit from SERDA membership and I will raise this issue of our membership before the municipal council, whether we should leave SERDA, and whether we should cancel their use of office space in the municipality’s building. Among the planned SERDA projects, not one will be implemented in Kiseljak this year either. Infrastructure renovation programs call for public illumination in Krupac above Sarajevo, illumination of Kalovito Hill in Pale, and public illumination of the intersection at Vrace, on the entity border, which means nothing for Kiseljak. Thus, we do not need to participate in any manner,” argues municipal chairman Malden Misuric Ramljak.

Kresevo municipal chairman Mato Barisic maintains the same: “ True, Kresevo is not included in a single project, but we are satisfied that SERDA at least opened an office in Kresevo. Time will tell how much use we will have from that,” says Barisic, adding: “However, if SERDA’s planned expansion into Eastern BiH, instead of Central BiH is true, that will be a clear message that we have nothing to gain from SERDA.”

(excerpt)

Irish to purchase Mostar Airport?

Dnevni list, June 9, 2005

An Irish business group announced is set to arrive in Mostar at the end of this month, June 21, to see firsthand Mostar Airport’s characteristics and potential. As we learned from sources close the City Government, the Irish, Italians, and Germans are most interested in a partnership with Mostar Airport and the City Government, as its majority owner, respectively. Director of Mostar Airport Marin Raspudic could not comment. He simply confirmed the undeniable importance of Mostar Airport for the whole Herzegovina region.

(excerpt)

Monument for Calvary victims

Slobodna Dalmacija, June 9, 2005

During the recent manifestation “Stolac Cultural Spring” in Radimlja near Stolac, a monument was erected in honor of Calvary (Bleiburg) victims. The lives of many Croats and Catholics came to an abrupt end here on the Radimlja River and on Vidovo Field near Stolac. The locality is also known as the “Stolac Bleiburg Field.”

A monument was erected upon one of the pits into which innocent victims of Croat nationality were thrown following the war, which caused harsh reactions in some Bosniak media, but later quieted down.

It is important to mention that over the last few days hundreds of people, whose ancestors perished here, stop by the memorial to pray and light candles. Sometimes several busses stop and during a brief respite the travelers remember the names of their dearest; names they were not allowed to utter for decades.

A group of 25 priests from different parishes in Croatia and BiH recently visited the memorial to honor innocent Croat victims.

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Deputy Federation Parliament Chairman Josip Merdzo: We will initiate a discussion on BH Steel and Agrokomerc

Vecernji list, June 12, 2005

Instead of reaching an agreement, at its last very thunderous meeting the Federation Government once again delayed solving the Aluminij issue, in spite of an earlier agreement between Federation Prime Minister Ahmet Hadzipasic and Aluminij Director Mijo Brajkovic.

A new committee was formed to harmonize the deal that had already been reached with Aluminij, while the Federation Parliament will have the final say. During the last meeting, Croat and Bosniak ministers debated for three hours whether the agreement to settle the Aluminij ownership structure should be adopted. Although HDZ and SDA enjoy a majority in the Federation Government, Party for BiH ministers once again came out on top, as they wish to either destroy Aluminij or at least stifle its development.

Deputy Federation Prime Minister Gavriilo Grahovac, of Party for BiH, barely accepted, after much convincing from Premier Hadzipasic, to be a member of the negotiating committee with Aluminij. Agriculture Minister Marinko Bozic asked during the debate why the Government did not pay nearly as much attention to the sale of BH Steel, to which Energy Minister Izet Zigic, of Party for BiH, nervously replied that he has nothing against reexamining that case.

Zigic's willingness will most likely be called upon by Federation Parliament representatives, since not all of the details from the Zenica sale are publicly available. At the very least, it is odd that the transaction was carried out via the Dutch Antilles. On the other hand, a large number of employees lost their job, while in the rundown portion of the gigantic complex that remained under state ownership, Croats were the largest group of employees.

Deputy Federation Parliament Chairman Josip Merdzo emphasized that the possible debate over Aluminij will surely lead to a debate on BH Steel, Agrokomerc, etc.

"There is no need for Parliament to debate this. Should the Government throw the ball into our court, it can be assumed that there will be a discussion on BH Steel, Agrokomerc and other privatization issues," stated Merdzo for Vecernji list. Merdzo added that he considers a postponement of a solution for Aluminij a political method for preventing its final resolution.

He stated that it was expected the Government would propose a final version of the agreement for the benefit of the company, workers, and the state.