



CAA Statement Ahead of BiH Constitutional Reform Negotiations in Washington, D.C., November 19-22

The Dayton Peace Accords in 1995 finally brought an end to the brutal war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This hastily constructed agreement reflected the reality and possibilities at that time. However, the agreement did not secure the conditions for a viable state.

Over the years the Croatian American Association (CAA) has consistently worked on behalf of Croat interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). We welcome Croat participation at the negotiating table this weekend in Washington, D.C. where they will be discussing the future of their country.

These negotiations are the continuation of months of talks amongst local leaders in BiH and, most recently, in Brussels. The CAA welcomes the participation of all stakeholders in these constitutional reform discussions.

However, at the same time, we express concern over the international community's involvement in this process. We are worried that, like Dayton, a resolution will again be imposed on all parties rather than negotiated to everyone's satisfaction. Thus, we call upon all political leaders involved in constitutional reform discussions to approach the negotiations in good faith and truly work towards consensus building, while resisting any potential attempts to impose a solution.

Any solution that does not address the fundamental asymmetry of the Dayton Accords – the entity structure – cannot be accepted as reform and must not be signed as part of a constitutional reform package.

It has long been the CAA's position that BiH should be structured in three layers of government to ensure not only an efficient and effective state level with a bicameral parliament capable of undertaking EU negotiations, but also a significant devolution of powers to the local municipal level. The middle level should be drawn according to geographic or economic criteria.

All efforts to reform the constitution must secure the rights to one's own language, culture, religion and education. No one individual or group should be in a position to suppress the rights of any other individual or group.

Should a final agreement not be reached in Washington, this would not necessarily be a failure. It is important to continue the open and frank dialogue already underway. All three major ethnic groups, as well as minorities, must continue talks on constitutional reform.

The time has come for local leaders and the people of BiH to take full ownership of the political process and decide their own future. Therefore, we call upon all party officials gathering in Washington, D.C. this weekend to sign a joint statement addressed to the Peace Implementation Council and all other relevant international bodies and organizations stating their wish to end the mandate of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) and expressing their joint commitment to work together towards their previously stated common goal – European Union and NATO integration.