



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Bosnia-Herzegovina External Relations briefing:  
Report: Feedback on CIIE in Bosnia and Herzegovina  
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## **Report: Feedback on CIIE in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

### **Media**

Very little, or nothing! This is the best description of the coverage China International Import Expo had in Bosnian media. Browsing through webpages of leading Bosnian dailies, such as Oslobodjenje, Dnevni avaz, Nezavisne novine, Dani and leading news-portals such as Klix.ba, Faktor.ba, Radio Sarajevo, the Times of Bosnia etc., it would be too generous to say that there is substantial number of articles mentioning CIIE in Shanghai. Therefore, instead of listing and sorting out the comments and responses this event has generated in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this part of the report will probably turn into goose chase for any available articles mentioning Shanghai Expo, Chinese anti-protectionism, Chinese going-out strategies and foreign-policy initiatives, or even on any recently published news with “China”, “Xi Jinping”, “Belt and Road” tags. Regional web-portals based in Bosnia and Herzegovina have reported about the 2018 Shanghai Expo in purely informative manner, adding very little to the info shared from other international news agencies.

The scarcity of “informed opinion” on China affairs in Bosnian media should not be surprising in comparative perspective. Serbia, a country with far more extensive political and economic relations with China and, more importantly, with more institutions focusing or specializing bilateral and regional relations with China was also without very elaborated domestic coverage on CIIE. In neighboring Croatia, the event got unusual attention thanks to Prime Minister Plenkovic. His attendance and the speech delivered on the Expo was retroactively spun in the media as a pinnacle of his 5-day visit to China. However, even with this high-level visit, Croatian media rarely departed from usual coverage of China related news that repeatedly introduces China as a new global actor, Chinese foreign policy initiatives and investment opportunities in Croatia. As a matter of fact, domestic quarrels slightly shifted media focus from Plenkovic`s visit and CIIE to Marrakesh declaration, migrants, conflict between the President and the PM, etc. When Plenkovic returned from the China visit, Shanghai Expo was already off the radar of the main media outlets.

Additional facts that have to be taken into account are reliance on English-based digests, copy-pasted covers on China affairs and typical time lag in delivering regionally or domestically angled perspective on China related topics. This was a case with CIIE, where little has been said out of the context of more global Sino-American tariff war. Some headlines emphasized Chinese economic role on global stage, China assuming leading role in the global free trade, or the

future of the global supply chains. Some media outlets directly featured op-eds from other English magazines, some refurbished recent critiques voicing out ‘China-threat’ narratives and some just reported basic facts on CIIE. Overall, far from being in “3 the most” (the most commented, the most read and the most important) section, CIIE remained in the ‘global’ section, not on headlines nor trended on any news site.

Al-Jazeera Balkans published an article: “Sajmom uvoza Kina otvara trziste za strane proizvode” (With the import fair, China opens domestic market to foreign products). This intentionally unsigned article conveyed the main points of CIIE from relatively neutral perspective. CIIE is depicted as a “Chinese response to the US protectionism” and “an attempt to subside critiques on Chinese trade policy and its export surplus causing disequilibrium in global economy”. Besides reporting a number of the world leaders attending CIIE (mentioning only Europeans plus Medvedev), the article features important parts of Xi’s speech on the opening, underlining Chinese commitment for global multilateralism, free trade and obvious allusions he made on the “trade war between Beijing and Washington” when pointing out “all the risks and factors contributing to instability of the global free trade system”.

In this vein, all relevant dailies reported the fact that despite “promising telephone call between Mr. Trump and Mr. Xi, no high-level American official attended opening ceremony”. Federal News Agency (FENA) reported the number of world leaders attending CIIE, including Czech President, Hungarian, Croatian and Russian Prime Ministers. Russian PM D. Medvedev was quoted saying that “Chinese opening (market for foreign products) is an excellent opportunity for Russian companies”. Croatian PM Plenkovic emphasized “Croatian commitment for the free trade and multilateralism” in economic exchanges with China. Bosnian edition of Croatian Vecernji list has quoted Croatian News Agency (HINA) in detailing the list of Croatian delegation attending CIIE, highlighting from Plenkovic’s speech “innovation, science and research” as potential fields of cooperation with China, and giving overall evaluation that “with this fair China has shown capacity for global economic leadership”.

## **Government**

In parallel to CIIE in Shanghai, on November 6 in Sarajevo started 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference on Innovation and Technology of China and Central East European countries. Similar topic and the emphasis on innovative cooperation was probably the reason why this event partially hijacked publicity off CIIE. This high-level conference was attended by BIH Chairman of Ministers (COM) Denis Zvizdic, Foreign Trade Minister Mirko Sarovic, Transport & Communication Minister Ismir Jusko and

Chinese Science and Technology Deputy Minister Zhang Jianguo. It caught attention of all leading media outlets in the country, mainly from investment angle. Several leading dailies reported the importance of this conference for multilateral economic development of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dnevno.ba has even published a headline claiming that “Zvizdic and Jusko explained to Chinese why they are more important to Bosnia and Herzegovina than Russians and Americans”.

High-level conference was a part of 16+1 framework and apart from Chinese deputy minister included guests from other regional countries. On the opening ceremony, COM Zvizdic emphasized importance of the cooperation under 16+1 framework and platform for exchange of innovations, talents, ideas and creative cooperation. The highlights of his speech include following: "We remain committed to the realization of all projects that are clearly defined in the guidelines of the Summit recently held under the 16 + 1 initiative. One of these initiatives is precisely the initiative for further development of the science, education, research and innovation. We consider it as an important basis for further expansion of our overall economy, strengthening the competitiveness and economic stability of BIH and the region.”

Bosnian participation and hosting of the conference was perceived as an important moment for development of competitiveness, originality and creativity in multilateral exchanges and cooperation. Also, as a possible indication on the Bosnian stance regarding economic multilateralism, impeded free trade and other points underlined in Xi`s speech in Shanghai, COM Zvizdic said: “This forum should be the beginning of good regional cooperation in which we will not only be represented as individual countries, because as such we are presenting small markets within the global game, but we will try to present the advantages and opportunities of the Western Balkans region, by making the cooperation network more binding, in fact showing and proving that there are very talented young people in this area who can be the true bearers of economic and economic development and the true bearers of our interconnection, not only in the region but also at the global level.” He also reemphasized the commitment of Bosnia and Herzegovina to be engaged in every activity that “promote comparative advantages of Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to accomplish professional and long-term sustainable, market-oriented evaluation of our resources.” Finally, Zvizdic said Bosnia and Herzegovina “strives and aims for the next three or four years to increase the level of exports of its products to China, and at least two or three times increase the scope of foreign trade cooperation with China and other Central and European countries. ”

## **NGO sector, business world**

First to react on CIIE was Chinese-Bosnian Friendship Association. Kina Danas (China Today), their official site shared an article that gave a detailed information on the main highlights of the forum. Purporting the “spirit” of Xi’s speech on the CIIE opening was an article related with APEC CEO meeting in Port Moresby held last week. In two articles, Xi Jinping was quoted as warning against “increasing trend of unilateralism and protectionism” and offering “Chinese program” of global governance.

Hailing idea of a community with ‘common shared future’ Chinese President offered five points of multilateral cooperation, which are focused on “(mutual) openness, development, innovation, tolerance and rules”. In concluding remarks, the article states that “despite protectionism and unilateralism casting shadow over global economic growth and increase global uncertainties, the tide of economic globalization is still moving forward”. In this context, the speech of President Xi Jinping is reported as “reflecting the consensus of various economies and highlighting the future traits of open economic cooperation in Asia and Pacific”.

Other NGO organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina have made a feedback on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference of Innovation and Technology. Sarajevo Unlimited, innovation sub-forum organized by Networks, an entrepreneurial, innovation and education center in Sarajevo was successful in pooling regional cooperation on innovation programs. Edin Mehic, founder of Networks said that authorities in the region must understand that young entrepreneurs want to make a difference, “for which this conference makes good starting point”. According to media, more than 400 companies attending the conference have also convinced in positive step the conference makes for regional cooperation, which despite the low feedback on CIIE, conveys positive attitude regional entrepreneurs have towards China inspired multilateral economic cooperation.