




## Weekly Briefing

**Bosnia-Herzegovina political briefing:**  
**BIH- Formation of Council of Ministers still uncertain**  
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## **BIH- Formation of Council of Ministers still uncertain**

In the last two months there were no any big political news in BIH. It is necessary to say in this way because all recent activities on political level were done in place of rather than despite of the ongoing crisis with formation of central government. Little has changed since the announcement of the major negotiations between the Big Three (SDA, HDZ, SNSD) in mid-April. Neither HDZ nor SDA officially initiated any talks with SNSD and the election of a new Council of Ministers is still back on the initial stage. Some opinions started to claim that the absence of any news related to a “big conclave” in fact means retrenchment of the current crisis for a very unpredictable time, to the extent that some doubts are raised about reaching a consensus in this year.

Meanwhile, SDA has made clear that is not willing to endorse a Serb candidate for the Chairman of the Council of Ministers if SNSD and the Republika Srpska does not change “quasi-legalist” stance regarding the BIH accession to NATO. SDA leader Bakir Izetbegovic has recently made a statement confirming that military neutrality is a question only BIH institutions can decide (as opposed to the RS Assembly resolution on neutrality) and indicated that there won't be any progress towards government formation if the Serb parties continue to hold this ‘joker’ in the negotiations. RS (mostly represented by SNSD) politicians are, on the other hand, principled in respecting the RS resolution, but vary in flexibility in which the cooperation and partnership with NATO should be realized. In general picture, everything less of the membership would be acceptable, but from diachronic perspective there are some concerns that accepting NATO pre-accession frameworks, such as MAP or ANP (Annual National Plan) would mean resorting to SDA “salami tactics” for accomplishing the full accession. Therefore, on media level, except some Dodik's statements poking Sarajevo, no one initiated any talks in the last two months that would be more than reiteration of principled positions regarding the NATO accession.

As an immediate result, Zlatko Tegeltija, the only candidate so far mentioned in media to come into consideration for the chairman position has no support from SDA (apparently also because he didn't make any program regarding his chairmanship). While this situation continues, acting Chairman Denis Zvizdic post-mandate overtime extended for over 9 months and he is likely to remain in this position for some time. External (European) pressure to find an end to the crisis also seems either inefficient or non-existent. The EC report from the end of May only mentioned the government crisis, purposefully void of making any explicit connection between the necessity of forming the central government and carrying out Reform

Agenda. One of the assumptions in the media had that deemphasizing the government crisis in the European agenda was a tactical retreat from going affront to the RS principal anti-NATO stance. While there is a general consensus on NATO policy in the RS, with no opposition party or group occupying dissenting opinion, it is expected that any external pressure would only exacerbate current crisis.

However, although not always explicit, Europeans have displayed double line of reasoning for BIH Euro-Atlantic integrations where BIH, on the one hand, should make substantial step to form central government in order to become eligible for candidacy status and start the European negotiations, while at the same time required a progress on the Atlantic path (NATO integrations) to fit NATO-EU complementarity norm followed by all previous candidate countries. (NATO-EU complementarity norm holds that the European integration is only possible in a stable environment secured by trusted security framework, which translates into: first become NATO member and then EU member). Difficulty with BIH is that the latter requirement is slipping from hands due to Dodik factor and is on the way to become a sole “issue” of the current government crisis.

Both SNSD and SDA are comfortable in internalizing the row over the NATO integration as a way to consolidate the support and rally on principled politics. They are in no rush and haven't made any suggestions when the next round of negotiations should occur. Ironically, only the EU finds interest in deemphasizing row over the NATO between Banja Luka and Sarajevo, because prolonged crisis only augments the responsibility of the EU to intervene. Liberal and progressive political circles in BIH hold that only Europe can this time break a tie, emphasizing that a policy of letting BIH institutions standing on their feet has never proven successful. Sejdic- Finci law, Mostar elections and (non-)biding opinion of BIH Constitutional Court are all cases pointing that segmented crises are only perpetuating when the EU or OHR refuses to intervene.

The EU, therefore, has an option to step in and digress from a self-imposed non-interventionism or to hold aside and wait for the NATO row to gradually wither away. Contrary to intuitive Euro-Atlantic complementarity norm, the EU would rather have BIH forming the government on its own and eventually obtain candidacy status without making any preconditions in regards to NATO. Therefore, for the EU the best option would be a blitz intervention in a way to break a tie between SNSD and SDA regarding the NATO accession somewhere in the middle without any biding and extremely divisive long-term commitments. However, for the time being, Europe continues to wait and hopes more than expects that the both sides will eventually reach a consensus without the need for intervention. This was also the message given on the last meeting of the Western Balkans and the EU countries (WB6+EU8)

organized in Poznan (Poland) in early July under the so called Berlin process framework.

After returning from the Poznan Summit, Chairman Zvizdic gave positive assurances on the support from the EU member countries. In the interview soon after the Poznan Summit, Zvizdic made optimistic comments on BIH perspective to obtain the candidacy status in this year, despite the EC report recommendation and a slow progress in implementing reforms. He said that this cooperation & connection agenda in past 5-6 years has given good results for BIH and emphasized that this year EU has decided to grant BIH 96.8 million EUR (more than half of total 180 million EUR received so far from this framework) for infrastructure projects, aiming to open new 25,000 jobs and link BIH on the pan-European corridor 5C (Budapest-Sarajevo- Ploce). Also, several declarations have been approved: on mutual recognition of academic qualifications, especially those of the BIH universities; providing set of policies for BIH Roma population (education and employment) and a memorandum for establishing an international Institute for Sustainable Technologies in Southeast Europe in BIH. The most important thing, as he added, is that Europe once again confirmed 'the European perspective for the Western Balkan countries' and make clear to prioritize "steps created by some countries towards the European integrations".

This generosity from the European side was perceived with some suspicions regarding the real intentions of Brussels. Media outlets rumored that this present was meant to engage local actors for another round of the negotiations without stepping into issues at stake. However, Chairman Zvizdic dismissed all these implicit assumptions, giving the assurance that a 'big conclave' is an internal matter and not presumptive to Euro-Atlantic integrations as long as the acting government keeps with the agenda set by the previous government.

Is this only a tactical reassurance given to BIH to bide the time for the government crisis or building up a mortgage to a current political elite in BIH (especially RS) is not yet very certain. Another thing fairly uncertain is how far the Europe will push its EU-NATO complementarity norm without directly intervening in the relations between Sarajevo and Banja Luka. First, nothing seems to indicate that the RS government conceded to something during the fairly uncooperative pro-NATO stance from Sarajevo. Croat MOP Komsic and SDA leader Izetbegovic were several times repeating "strong" pro-NATO opinion, only to find a strong reaction on the other side. Second, considering the RS Assembly resolution irrelevant or para-legal is itself valid objection, except that it enjoys wide popularity and is supported by almost all Serb political parties. Instead of focusing on legality of the RS opposition, bigger problem for Sarajevo is in fact the (popular) legitimacy of the anti-NATO opposition. This issue is something Sarajevo purposefully tend to ignore, so in the last two months in media appeared only rebuttals against Dodik and mutual accusations "on the lack of political will on the other

side” which itself became symptomatic of a certain fear of starting a dialogue conducive to real negotiations. Third, the fact that the both sides are very comfortable in the current entrenchment goes only at the expense of the European non-interventionism and builds up its responsibility for action. It is becoming obvious that the Western powers might need again to come up with the middle solution for the both sides that includes consensus on gradual and partial NATO integration without implying eventual accession. This is now a decision with ticking clock on the European side, later Europe steps in to help negotiations, larger the NATO row will be and more deep intervention will be required.