



Weekly Briefing

**Bosnia-Herzegovina social briefing:
A Birthday, a Wedding, an Office Horse Ride
and a Pre-session Accordion Party**
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Summary

This briefing will be presenting several recent social events created by the local politicians that are also showcases of how the politicians themselves perceive their official and personal positions in the state and the society. August offered the media in Bosna and Herzegovina two celebrational treats: the birthday of Dragan Čović, the unofficial Croat leader that was attended by highly esteemed guests and unveiled his new family coat of arms, and the wedding of Jasmina Izetbegović, daughter of Bakir Izetbegović, the Bosniak political powerhouse, who's godfather was none other than the Turkish president Erdogan himself. In September the Bosnian public was being amused by the horse-riding lesson of the young Banja Luka mayor Draško Stanivuković that he was giving to a female colleague in the office, while in October the unofficial Republika Srpska leader Milorad Dodik was being amused by morning drinks and accordion songs before the session of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Introduction

Certain events in the private lives of some of the most powerful politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina are regarded by the media as exclusive social news. On the other hand, as the media services the social output of the events, we also gain an insight into a showcase of wealth, reserve-less self-importance and vanity that these events and their main actors present, alongside the little respect they show for the official positions and citizens they were elected by, as they also reveal some of the also clear political messages that can be easily recognized within them. Recently, the public of Bosnia and Herzegovina had witness two of such private exclusive events, birthday of Dragan Čović and wedding of Jasmina Izetbegović, as well a leaked video scandal by the recently elected mayor of Banja Luka privatizing his office and yet another stunt by Milorad Dodik who took time to privatize a state event.

Dragan Čović's birthday

Dragan Čović, member of the House of Peoples and the president of the main political party representing Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica, HDZ) had celebrated his 65th birthday in August. An exclusive party was held in a summerhouse Radobolj in Mostar. Among the invited guests was the member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and informal leader of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, as well as Goran Grlić Radman, minister of foreign affairs of Republic of Croatia. The attendance of both of these political representatives on a private social event was also obviously planned to send a strong political message of open partnerships as well. Particularly spectacular was the arrival of Milorad Dodik who arrived with a helicopter landing on the field of the stadium of the local football club Zrinjski. Before the birthday party, Dodik held a meeting with Serbian associations in Mostar. Halid Bešlić, perhaps the most popular Bosnian singer was the main entertainer of the special evening. Furthermore, the thing that was very much a discussion of the media was a specific birthday case which had been decorated with the newly introduced a coat of arms of the family Čović. The coat entails the following features: a red Latin styled cross signifying the Catholic church, red and white checkers signifying Croatian nationality, a golden lion signifying strength and courage and a one-headed black eagle holding a snake in his paws and looking towards the west as a sign of rulership and defender of faith, alongside more decorative heraldic features. It is needless to point out that, according to the coat of arms, Dragan and his family value themselves quite highly, almost as a local royalty.

Jasmina Izetbegović's wedding

Jasmina Izetbegović is the daughter of Bakir Izetbegović, the current president of the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka demokratske akcije, SDA) and member of the national [House of Peoples](#), and granddaughter of Alija Izetbegović, the Bosniak leader in the 1990's war. The wedding was held in Sarajevo in August, and was also preformed as a traditional Muslim ceremony in Begova džamija, the most important mosque in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The groom, an IT businessman from Germany Ćamil Humačkić, supposedly spent around a million convertible marks (half a million euro) on its costs. Proclaimed by the media as the wedding of the year, it was a must-be-attended event for the Sarajevo socialites, among them also the Federal Prime minister Fadil Novalić. Professionally, Jasmina Izetbegović is a director of marketing firm that makes profit in millions by servicing state companies. But the biggest

attention was attracted by the choice of the godfather, who was none other but the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Before attending the ceremony at the mosque Erdogan paid his respect at the grave of Alija Izetbegović. The media also reported that Erdogan's son and his wife are great friends with Jasmina. Erdogan's presence at the wedding can to an extent be regarded as an informal state visit which proclaims Erdogan's complete support to a certain political option in Bosnia and Herzegovina that he had been supporting in the past, and a show of continuation of Turkish interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina as an area of influence based foremostly on religious and historical ties.

Draško Stanivuković's office horse ride

Republika Srpska, as Bosnia and Herzegovina in general, never stops the regular production of social and political scandals. Draško Stanivuković, the very young (28 years) and recently appointed mayor of Banja Luka, who had won the election last year in a very direct confrontation with the wishes of Milorad Dodik, had not lacked his share of scandals since he assumed the mayor's office in December 2020. His most recent scandal is a mobile phone video that leaked into the media in late September this year. The video shows Stanivuković in an office teaching one of his female colleagues, a city employee Olga Babović, how to ride him as a horse. The pair is obviously having fun as the rider at one point falls out of the "saddle", while another female colleague is watching the riding class and a third person is filming. The reaction from the mayor's office was that it is an old video, made before the time of his appointment as the mayor, as well as that it was not filmed in the mayor's office. Before becoming the mayor Stanivuković was for three years a member of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska. The video, not by chance, also came at as timely response to the "Kiseonik" affair. Namely, Stanivuković accused and filed reports against high state officials of Republika Srpska for responsibility of providing the hospital patients on respirators during the COVID-19 pandemic with industrial oxygen of lower quality instead of the medical one that is required for such needs.

Milorad Dodik's pre-session accordion party

Milorad Dodik continues his utter tour of disrespect towards the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the ultimate plan of its dissolution and the secession of Republika Srpska. In a media stunt on the 18th of October, just before the official session of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dodik held a small party in his office. During the morning, and in the company of his political associates, he brought an accordion player and sang nationalistically themed Serbian songs while having shots of rakija (distilled liquor with a high percentage of alcohol). The video was published on the official Twitter account of Dodik's party, The Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata, SNSD), with the words: "It has been a long time since songs with more beautiful themes were heard in Sarajevo". Previously, Dodik announced that he was attending the session of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina only to vote against all the suggestions. Because of this, the video can easily be interpreted as a social media provocation that was leading to the event. The strategy of blocking state administration in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been performed by Dodik and his political colleagues since the end of July as a way of pressure to pull back the war crimes denial law introduced by the former High Representative Valentin Inzko.

Conclusion

From the four social events listed above it can be concluded that the relevant politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina have a hard time in separating their professional from their private business. It can be said that they even make the use of it as a media show of power and clear political stances. This was the case of Čović's birthday, who he celebrated it with Milorad Dodik and the Croatian minister of foreign affairs, Izetbegović's wedding where the godfather was the president of Turkey, and Dodik's early pre-session drinking and singing, messaging what he thinks of his duties to follow. Among these, the office horse-ride of the young mayor Stanivuković was probably the only event which was filled with just insignificant fun.