



Weekly Briefing

Bosnia-Herzegovina political briefing:
Arrest of the leading people of the judiciary and the security sector
Faruk Borić

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.
Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Ju Weiwei
Kiadásért felelős személy: Feng Zhongping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.
 +36 1 5858 690
 office@china-cee.eu
 china-cee.eu

Arrest of the leading people of the judiciary and the security sector

Summary

When talking about the problems faced by the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its society, problems related to the judiciary are always at the top of the long list. Like the legislative and executive powers, this third one, the judicial one, suffers from political and other pressures that surface from time to time to the public in the form of various affairs. In previous years, top political officials, including party leaders and heads of the executive branch, have been arrested and tried. Also, the public is used to the fact that the heads of prosecutor's offices and courts are replaced due to various criticisms, including inappropriate contacts and similar qualifications. Nevertheless, the arrest of the first man of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former head of the Intelligence and Security Agency raised the scale of the scandal to an unprecedented level.

Introduction

Ranko Debevec was the President of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time of his arrest. At the same time, Osman Mehmedagić was former director of the Intelligence and Security Agency of BiH (OSA), one of the most powerful police institutions at the state level of BiH. Mehmedagić is also the man whom the State Department blacklisted last year, after OSA got a new director. The arrest took place on the eve of the new year, and the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina extended the custody of the two suspects on two occasions. The last time the detention was extended was on February 16, when the Court extended the detention by one month, on a request by BiH Prosecutor's Office.

Debevec, suspended president of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Osman Mehmedagić, former director of OSA, were arrested on December 18, 2023. The prosecution suspects them of abusing their position and illegally wiretapping employees of the state court and prosecutor's office in 2020, within the framework of several judicial cases against organized crime and corruption.

During the hearing on Thursday, February 15, the prosecutor in this case stated that Debevec received a bribe from Zdravko Mamić in order to help him in the proceedings against Mamić in BiH. By the way, Mamić is a well-known tycoon and football worker in the region

of Southeast Europe, the former all-powerful director of the Dinamo Football Club from Zagreb, known for his excessive behavior in public and numerous accusations of corruption. Mamić was tried in Croatia, and after the court there convicted him, he fled to Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose authorities, as a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina, cannot extradite him to Croatia.

Serious allegations

In the Mamić-Debevec case, it is about extradition proceedings in which Croatia requested Mamić's extradition after the verdict in that country where he was convicted of embezzling around EUR 17 million from the football club Dinamo¹.

In addition, as stated by the prosecutor, Debevec also took a bribe from the "Kramar" car dealership from city Ljubuški in West Herzegovina, against which more than 700 disputes were filed. Explaining why the detention extension is necessary, the prosecution stated that Debevec also met with multiple convicted felon from East Sarajevo, Đorđe Ždrale².

What is known about Mehmedagić and Debevec? Within the same case, the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) arrested one person on February 13. In the press release, SIPA stated that the prosecution suspects the arrested person of the criminal offense of "false representation", as well as the criminal offense from Article 29 of the Law on Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina³.

Since March 15, 2023, Osman Mehmedagić has been on the "black list" of the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), which operates under the United States Department of the Treasury. In the explanation, the American authorities then stated that he was sanctioned because, as the general director of OSA, he abused the state telecommunications company in favor of the Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka demokratske akcije* - SDA), one of the largest

¹ The verdict against Zdravko Mamić was confirmed, by which he was sentenced to six and a half years in prison. <https://www.klix.ba/sport/potvrdjena-presuda-zdravku-mamicu-kojom-je-osudjen-na-sest-i-po-godina-zatvora/210315154>

² POLICE AGENCIES ASSESSED THAT HIS LIFE WAS IN THREATEN: Minister Nenad Nešić in a conflict with Đorđe Ždral, the level of his protection increased... https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/321662/policijske_agencije_procijenile_da_mu_je_ugrozen_zivot_ministar_nenad_nesic_u_sukobu_sa_djordjem_zdralom_povecan_stepen_njegove_zastite.html

³ Prolonged detention of the suspended President of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former chief intelligence officer. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/pritvor-produzen-debevec-mehmedagic/32822438.html>

political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mehmedagić is known because during the 1990s he was a companion of the then president of the SDA and member of the Presidency of the Republic of BiH Alija Izetbegović. Later, until today, he was and is known as the most loyal associate of the current president of the SDA and Alija's son, Bakir Izetbegović. OFAC also stated that there is credible information that Mehmedagić cooperated with criminal networks to enrich himself and his political party.

On December 11, 2023, the United States expanded the sanctions against Mehmedagić and added his wife Amela Mehmedagić Šehović to the list.

The Disciplinary Commission for Judges of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HJSC), the body responsible for appointing and sanctioning all judges and prosecutors, issued a public reprimand to Ranko Debevec in August last year, but the second-instance commission absolved him of responsibility.

Suspended President

He was also reported to have "deliberately provided false, misleading or insufficient information in connection with job applications, matters of promotion and advancement in the service or any other he was also reported for "behavior in court and outside the court that harms the reputation of the judicial function".

The HJPC suspended Debevec from the position of President of the BiH Court after his arrest⁴.

Debevec has been the president of the State Court since January 2017. In January 2023, he was re-elected to this position. The disciplinary lawsuit accused Debevec of meeting with the director of the OSA, Mehmedagić, against whom criminal proceedings were being conducted at that time, in front of the apartment of a third person, as well as that the prosecutor Ms. Vedrana Mijović, who is handling the case in to which the defendant, a participant in the proceedings, sent a comment with inappropriate content. Debevec was charged with the same claim that since 2004, with the exception of 2009, through personal financial statements submitted to the HJPC, he had intentionally provided insufficient information about assets

⁴ *Ibid.*

abroad, that is, in Spain⁵.

Pressure on prosecutor

The duo Debevec-Mehmedagić have been in custody for more than two months. The prosecutor in this case, Ms Bojana Jolović, said at the detention hearing that she encountered numerous obstacles during the investigation, which is why she believes that it is only possible to conduct the investigation with detention measures.

"In my career, I have not had such obstacles," said Jolović.

She explained the suspect's way of acting by the fact that the second defendant requested, through official requests, permission to tap the telephones of judges and prosecutors, which was approved by Debevec. The requests were written on the basis of the OSA's alleged findings, which the prosecutor said were such that "it is clear to a layman that they are not justified and are not sufficient for the Court to approve the monitoring of telephone communications."

She also presented information that all those orders have disappeared from the records of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is, that the Prosecution suspects that they have been destroyed. It was also stated that these were judges and prosecutors who worked on cases that could be linked to the suspects. "The suspects had an interest in these cases, that is, they were mentioned in them," Jolović said.

Mehmedagić was prosecuted before the Court of BiH in 2021 for the "Diploma" scandal in which he was suspected of abusing his official position, forging documents and claiming money⁶. In another trial, in 2020, Mehmedagić was accused of illegally seizing video surveillance footage from a post office in Sarajevo, from which an anonymous letter was sent in which various accusations were made against him and SDA officials.

The Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina charged him with the former Minister of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina Selmo Cikotić and another person for illegally

⁵ Arrested Debevec, president of the Court of BiH and Mehmedagić, former director of OSA.

<https://detektor.ba/2023/12/18/uhapsen-debevec-predsjednik-suda-bih-i-mehmedagic-bivsi-direktor-osa-e/>

⁶ Vasvija Vidović: OSA had only one Mehmedagić diploma in its file, the one from Banja Luka. And it is valid. <https://raport.ba/vasvija-vidovic-osa-je-u-svom-dosjeu-imala-samo-jednu-mehmedagic-evu-diplomu-onu-banjalucku-i-ona-je-validna/>

appointing members of the commission that decides on who has access to classified information⁷.

Tapped phones

Debevec and Mehmedagić were connected by a "chance meeting" in 2020, which is why Debevec was issued a public warning in August 2022. It was about inappropriate contact with Mehmedagić, against whom proceedings were then being conducted before the BiH Court .

Prosecutor Jolović did not provide information on which cases were worked on by judges and prosecutors heard by OSA. She pointed out that the private phones of Prosecutor's Office investigators were tapped. She also stated that during the month and a half of the investigation, she herself "felt that she was being followed", explaining this by the fact that the witness she heard twice told her that the suspects knew that he was being heard and that he was coming to the premises of the Prosecutor's Office⁸.

The prosecutor presented information about how Debevec tried to hide one of the three cell phones into the lawyer's bag during detention at the State Agency for Investigation and Protection. The suspended President of the Court added to the already great drama surrounding his arrest by bringing a hidden mobile phone into SIPA's premises, by doing this. The omission was made by police officers who were supposed to search him at the entrance to the building. He gave them the phone or phones voluntarily, but kept one with him. The Prosecution of Bosnia and Herzegovina also claims that Debevec refused the search. Lawyer Ms Vasvija Vidović was searched on her way out of SIPA and her mobile phone was confiscated, and she was taken into custody. No detention was requested for her⁹.

Property in Spain

Instead of searching him like every other arrested person, they took him at his word, which shows that he still had some credibility as president of the BiH Court. The continuation

⁷ New investigation against OSA director Mehmedagić and minister Cikotić.
<https://detektor.ba/2020/12/02/nova-istraga-protiv-direktora-osa-e-mehmedagica-i-ministra-cikotica/>

⁸ Details from the hearing: Ranko Debevec begged judge Perić not to order custody.
<https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/detalji-s-rocista-ranko-debevec-molio-sudiju-perica-da-ne-odreduje-pritvor/525936>

⁹ *Ibid.*

of the process should reveal what exactly the phone of the suspended judge was hiding. The media claim that the content of the third phone is not yet decoded¹⁰.

The part of the story with Debevc, that is, with the property in Spain, is particularly bizarre. Namely, the media reported that Debevec had Spanish citizenship and property in the name of Ranko Debevec Kaveson. It is disputed that BiH does not have a signed agreement on dual citizenship with the Kingdom of Spain, which means that Debevec cannot have dual citizenship of BiH and Spain. But not only that.

A few years ago, a portal from Sarajevo was the first to discover and announce that Debevec owns property in Spain and that he has the citizenship of this country, and that he did not report either of these to the authorities in the High Judicial and Prosecutor's Council (HJPC). And that is an apartment with an area of 99m² located in Torremolinos, purchased in 1999, value of 75,682.71 EUR and a parking space of 12m². Debevec also has a driver's license in Spain, as well as a bank account. Given that Debevec hid his property and identity in Spain, and later made an excuse that he did not know that he should have reported it, the question is what he was hiding - the media are asking these days¹¹.

Meetings in Malaga

It is not only the media that is interested. Prosecutor Jolović revealed that Debevec was hanging out with Mladen Lučić at a time when his brother Miloš Lučić was under investigation at the State Prosecutor's Office. Namely, the BiH Court announced that it confirmed the indictment against Miloš Lučić, the former Minister of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH. A few hours before that announcement, Miloš's brother Mladen Lučić was mentioned in courtroom number 4 of the BiH Court, where the hearing was held on the proposal of the Prosecutor's Office of BiH to extend the detention of Debevec.

"Meetings with him in Spain are indicative," prosecutor Jolović said briefly, announcing

¹⁰ How the suspended president of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ranko Debevec, managed to bring a mobile phone into SIPA's premises. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/kako-je-suspendovani-predsjednik-suda-bih-ranko-debevec-usprio-unijeti-mobitel-u-prostorije-sipa-e/231224063>

¹¹ The scandal with Debevc turns into a mega-affair. What is happening is only the tip of the iceberg: What is his "secret" apartment in Malaga hiding? <https://raport.ba/skandal-s-debevcem-prerasta-u-megaafetu-ovo-sto-se-desava-je-tek-vrh-ledenog-brijega-sta-krije-njegov-tajni-apartman-u-malagi/>

the investigation in connection with those meetings between Debevec and Mladen Lučić, and saying that she mentioned this information in the context of the premeditated criminal acts that are being charged against the former President of the BiH Court¹².

Mladen is the brother of Miloš Lučić, the former minister for human rights, who is accused by a confirmed indictment of numerous embezzlements with budget money and material resources of the ministry. Miloš was arrested at the end of 2022, and the indictment against him was brought at the end of December last year, ten days after Debevec was arrested. The Prosecution of BiH has revealed in the investigation so far that the brother of Miloš Lučić, Mladen and Debevec stayed together in Spain at the end of November 2023, in Malaga, the city where Debevec has an apartment. The investigation of the BiH Prosecutor's Office should reveal whether the information that Debevec and Mladen Lučić even traveled on the same plane and that they met several times during their several-day stay in Malaga is correct.

In this part of the investigation, the Prosecutor's Office of BiH will probably use the mechanisms of international legal assistance in order to find out details about the nature of the relationship between Debevec and the brother of the accused before the BiH Court. Then, authorities will be able to determine nature of contacts and answer if this meetings were related to possible mediation to obtain a lighter sentence for former minister. It is increasingly certain that the help of the Spanish competent authorities will be requested for the search of Debevec's apartment in Malaga. Debevec's defense described Mladen Lukić's meeting with the former President of the BiH Court as accidental, and that meeting happened in a restaurant in Sarajevo. They did not say anything about the trip and stay in Spain. Meanwhile, the media continues to ask more and more questions¹³.

False identity

But that's not the end of the bizarre details that appear in connection with this case.

The investigation of the BiH Prosecutor's Office showed that Debevec in numerous occasions presented himself as an agent of the OSA, an office managed by Mehmedagić, who

¹² In Spain, Debevec was meeting with the brother of the then suspected state minister. <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/885768/debevec-se-u-spaniji-sastajao-s-bratom-tadasnje-osumnjicenog-drzavnog-ministra>

¹³ All roads lead to Malaga: What will the investigation reveal about Ranko Debevec's association with Nešić's godfather Mladen Lučić in Spain. <https://raport.ba/svi-putevi-vode-u-malagu-sta-ce-otkriti-istraga-o-druzenju-ranka-Debevec-s-nesicevim-kum-mladenom-lucic-u-spaniji/>

is also in custody! That news, the media reports, shocked the employees of the Prosecutor's Office, as well as those in the BiH Court. The media are not writing about the details yet, except that the fact that Mr. Milisav Pijuk, the head of security at the BiH Court who was also the driver of President Debevec, who was arrested and then released to defend himself, also impersonated himself. He admitted all this in SIPA. Their code names were - for Court President Debevec "Inspector Dževad" and "Dževdet", and Pijuk used the code name "Investigator/Inspector Amir". In addition, Pijuk, according to the order of Debevec, installed listening devices in the Court, which OSA did not even know about. However, the fact that Debevec ordered Pijuk to photograph all the witnesses when they arrived at the Court and the Prosecutor's Office is a surprising fact, as well as a proof of the intent of what kind of crime is involved when it comes to this duo.

That's how Debevec, and then Mehmedagić, knew who was being questioned in this institution, primarily from OSA. Pijuk sent all the photographs and the names of the witnesses to Debevec, and the President of the Court then to Mehmedagić¹⁴.

Conclusion

The whole story is more like the plot of a political thriller than real events, especially if one take into account that BiH is a country that pretends to be a member of the European Union, a community of states and a club that insists on high standards when it comes to democracy, procedures, tripartite division of government, etc. But the witty and cynical Bosnians have been saying for a long time that satire has died in BiH because reality is more satirical than any imagination. And, indeed, with all due respect to the fact that the process is ongoing and that everyone is innocent until proven guilty, the case is full of extremely bizarre details that it is difficult for anyone to invent them. All in all, after carefully reading the claims of the state prosecutor's office and the accusations against people who were at the very top of the police and judicial apparatus, in charge of the most important and complex cases such as terrorism, economic crime, war crimes... it becomes clear why many experts and analysts tend to claim that the judicial system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of the problem, not part of the solution. And that something radical must be done to change that.

¹⁴ Secret "agents" of the OSA: "Dževad" and "Dževdet" were the code names of Ranko Debevac when he was Inspector Amir?! <https://www.avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/886480/tajni-agenti-osa-e-dzevad-i-dzevdet-bila-kodna-imena-ranka-debevca-ko-je-inspektor-amir>