



National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation
PO Box 78152, Washington DC 20013

September 20, 2016

High Representative Valentin Inzko
Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Emerika Bluma 1
71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dear Honorable High Representative Inzko:

The National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation (NFCA) wishes to add its support to the recent letter sent by the Croat Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dragan Covic, to the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC). The NFCA believes this to be the ideal time for the PIC Steering Board to seriously address the systemic problem of inequality and the inferior position held by Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and within its entity Federation of BiH, which has diminished the multinational character, sustainability, security and stability for the entire region.

Both the Washington Agreement and the Dayton Peace Accord (DPA) guaranteed full equality for all three constituent peoples of BiH, and yet the BH Croats have seen their legitimate rights deprived and altered over the past twenty-five years. There has clearly been a drift and growing methodical inequality and constitutional flaws which have been deepened by the legislative, constitutional and procedural interventions of the Office of High Representative (OHR) in conjunction with Bosniak political elites. This ongoing trend seriously undermines the constitutive position of Croats within the country. This has enabled Bosniak political decision-makers to override the political rights of the Croats, unimpeded by power-sharing checks and balances and thus, against the will of the legitimate political representatives of the Croat people in BiH.

The NFCA believes that all key players are in agreement that the institutional guarantees of Croats must be preserved in order that they truly remain a constituent people within the Federation and in BiH as a whole. The Croat presence and participation in BiH institutional settings is necessary to ensure that BiH remains a viable, multi-ethnic society which increases the viability of the BiH Presidency and Government. This commitment should clearly be of interest to both the EU and the United States, as we could otherwise be facing the potential of the emergence of a state and society in the heart of Europe which gravitates toward non-Western autocratic, non-democratic states.



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The Croats of BiH need reaffirmed empowerment and enhanced co-decision capacities in Federation BiH. We believe that if certain electoral law changes do not happen and the Croats remain excluded from meaningful participation and fair decision-making in shared institutions on the Federal level, then instability in the country will only increase. While no demand is currently being made for the establishment of a third Croat-majority federal entity, we wish you to keep in mind that such an option is one which is a legitimate one. This may be the ideal time to consider a few Croat majority cantons in a federal union that has long been advocated by several prominent BH Croats.

There are five specific examples in President Covic's letter that clearly state and expose the flaws within the constitutional framework of BiH and the Federation of BiH:

1. The illegitimate means in which Bosniaks and other non-Croats can elect the Croat-designated Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (even in a scenario where all Croats voted to support one candidate, an entirely unlikely prospect).
2. Institutional amendments to the Constitution of the Federation of BiH and BiH election law that deprive or diminish the rights of Croats guaranteed and safeguarded within the House of People, Government and other key institutions and bodies within the Federation of BiH. It is unacceptable that the Constitution of BiH can be changed without the consent of BH Croat political representatives, as is the growing disregard for the principles of parity and consensus in higher administrative and political levels.
3. Newly dictated amendments that solidify power with Bosniak representatives at the expense of Croats, placing Croats in an inferior position and allowing Bosniaks within the Federation of BiH to make decisions without the input and participation of BH Croats.
4. An increasing list of institutional changes that directly harm and affect the equal distribution of taxes, including appointments to the Public Broadcasting System, ministries and within areas of several canton-related sovereignty, all of which clearly favor Bosniak political representatives.
5. The inability of Croats to fully exercise their cultural and linguistic autonomy within BiH, given that they have been intentionally deprived of the right to have a radio station and TV channel in the Croatian language focused on the specific needs of Croats in BiH. Such rights are accessible to national minorities within many EU countries, while they have been denied to a constituent people of BiH.



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The path to a more secure, stable and consolidated BiH as a successful nation-state is the empowerment of Croats and seriously dealing with their grievances. It is our hope that the PIC Steering Board will re-affirm and establish the necessary power-sharing principles that embody and guarantee the equality of constituent peoples as set forth in the DPA and the Washington Agreement.

We firmly believe this is necessary for the vitality of constitutionalism and the rule of law in BiH, as well as to ensure that BiH retains a European perspective and the means for constructive participation in the largest union of states and peoples. BH Croats (who are also citizens of the EU) and their political leadership have displayed a great level of maturity and have proven that they are firmly dedicated to lead the rest of the country toward such a future.

Lastly, we look to the United States and the PIC to step up and fulfill their responsibilities to re-establish the institutional freedom and equality of BH Croats so that they can maximize their ambitions for their country. These necessary goals must be accomplished so that BiH can become a full participating member of all Euro-Atlantic institutions, a goal which will benefit all peoples and citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Sincerely,

Steven Rukavina, President

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