

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Bosnian Castling

It could have been a gratifying day for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). On May 31st, the budget was finally adopted. An opportunity to address previously ignored reforms presented itself. However, this did not happen. The vote on the budget brought the escalating dispute between Zlatko Lagumdžija's Social Democrats (SDP) and Sulejman Tihić's Party of Democratic Action (SDA) to the brink. SDA representatives voted against the proposed budget. With this, the mood in the six-part governing coalition reached a record low. SDP leadership subsequently called for the SDA to be expelled from the BiH Council of Ministers, the country's state-level institution of governance. A new party to take the SDA's place, controversial media mogul Fahrudin Radončić's Alliance for a Better Future for BiH (SBB), had already been selected. The SDP leadership would like to make Radončić the new Minister of Security. However, Lagumdžija cannot make this decision alone. The Parliament has the final word. There, the SDA is in a position to block any new appointments. Whether this SDA makes use of this option remains to be seen. One thing is clear: the longer the power struggles continue, the longer planned reforms will be postponed. This would represent a severe blow to BiH's European integration.

The Tip of the Iceberg

Lagumdžija sent a letter to Vjekoslav Bevanda, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, requesting that he dismiss the Minister of Security, Sadik Ahmetović, Minister of Defense, Muhamed Ibrahimović and the Deputy Minister of Finance, Fuad Kasumović (all SDA). Through voting against the budget, the SDA destroyed any trust formerly held by the SDP, as well as the basis for future cooperation, according to Lagumdžija. The SDP leadership's opinion is that the chairmen of the six ruling parties had come to an agreement during their special session in Sarajevo on May 23rd.¹ The SDA denies this. SDA leader Sulejman Tihić emphasized that his criticism of the budget had been no secret. The SDA's behavior was predictable.² The heart of the dispute is the specific amount of the budget, which totals 1.3 million Convertible Marks (BAM), or approximately half the amount in Euro. The vast majority of the budget, 950 million BAM, is to be used for financing state institutions. Almost 500 million BAM has been allocated for servicing foreign debt. This leaves very little for investing. In fact, spending in this category has been frozen. This was done at the request of the SNSD President and

¹ "Lagumdžija zatražio od Bevande smjene ministara iz SDA." *Moje Vijesti*. 31.05.12. <<http://www.mojevijesti.ba/novost/124872/Lagumdžija-zatražio-od-Bevande-smjene-ministara-iz-SDA>>.

² "Tihić: Za SDA na prvom mjestu je država, tek onda entiteti." *Bljesak.info*. 23.05.12. <<http://www.bljesak.info/web/article.aspx?a=6491f35c-5ffa-455f-a7fb-109eb31959fb&c=a76d03e1-6e68-46ef-9626-00aa1c12c7ae>>.

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President of the Republika Srpska (RS), Milorad Dodik. Dodik makes no secret of the fact that he wants the state-level government to remain as small as possible. Rather, he would prefer that the money flow directly into BiH's two principle parts; the entities. For Dodik, and many other Serb politicians in the RS, the entity is paramount. The state of BiH as such is merely a necessary – and expensive – evil. Ognjen Tadic from the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) suggested that the "money in the budget is enough to finance the institutions established by the OHR."³ Only Mladen Ivanic, Chairman of the Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) was conciliatory: "the budget is not good, but it is realistic."⁴ The SDA rejected the proposed budget. According to SDA Chairman Tihic, the state would not be able to complete its work, let alone meet the challenges of EU and NATO integration via the new budget.⁵ He accused his coalition partners of strangling of strangling state-level institutions. At first glance, the SDA Chairman appears to be correct. Salaries for state employees are to be reduced by approximately 4.5%. However, these budget cuts are manageable. Other countries in the region have been forced to make much more significant reductions.⁶ Furthermore, that accusation that the country will not be able to meet its international obligations is not necessarily true. Although the Ministry of Security's budget was cut, that of the Transport Ministry was increased. The reasoning behind this is Croatia's upcoming EU accession in 2013.⁷ Tihic is correct,

³ "Budget BiH usvojen u prvom citanju." *Aljazeera*. 29.05.12. <<http://balkans.aljazeera.net/makale/budzet-bih-usvojen-u-prvom-citanju>>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Samir Huseinovic. "Usvojen Nacrt budzeta za 2012. godinu." *Deutsche Welle*. 18.04.2010. <<http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15890993,00.html>>.

⁷ The border of BiH will then become the external border of the EU. The country must make significant investments in its border-crossing

however, when it comes to the unresolved issue of compensating war veterans. These individuals will receive approximately 19 million BAM. In this area, the early pensioners pose the greatest challenge. Soldiers forced into early retirement at the age of 35 are now arguing that they were promised compensation that was never received.⁸ According to Senad Hubjer, who represents the retired soldiers of the BiH Armed Forces, the money set aside in the budget is nowhere near enough to address the problems former soldiers face.⁹

A closer look demonstrates that disagreement over the budget is not the true reason for the coalition crisis. Rather, the relationship between the SDA and SDP has long been dysfunctional. Quarrels on the entity-level, in the Federation of BiH (FBiH), which has a predominantly Bosniak and Croat population, have been going on for some time now. Both parties have been in the FBiH government since March 2011. There, they constituted the so-called "Platform," in cooperation with two Croat parties. These are the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP) and the People's Party Work for Betterment (NSRzB). There was no healthy work environment to be found among the Platform's "elephants," the SDA and SDP. Their interests were simply too different. Conflicts about the "Law on Regulating Internal Affairs,"¹⁰ religious

infrastructure. "Bosnia and Herzegovina as a Reliable and Willing European Partner." *EUPM. Mission Magazine* 93. s. 4-5. <<http://www.eupm.org/FCKeditor/Images/Media/Mission%20Mag/MissionMag%20093.pdf>>.

⁸ Samir Huseinovic. "Usvojen Nacrt budzeta za 2012. godinu." *Deutsche Welle*. 18.04.2010. <<http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15890993,00.html>>.

⁹ According to Hubjer, more than 28 million BAM is necessary. Ibid.

¹⁰ Underlying this is the controversy over the rules affecting the appointment of the Police Director at the federal level. The new law foresees the selection of the Police Director by the entity governments, and no longer via an independent committee. The SDA has criticized this law, suggesting the police will now be politically controlled.

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instruction in public schools and the privatization of state-owned companies abounded. This was confirmed by the SDA General Secretary Amir Zukric.¹¹ Each of these disputes affected public opinion related to the parties. However, the SDA generally appeared to be more negatively affected. In light of the quickly approaching municipal elections, Sulejman Tihic, once the coalition's most vehement advocate, decided to put some space between his party and the SDP. The disagreement over the budget provided him with precisely such an opportunity. Inside his own party, the "orthodox" representatives thought this an intelligent move as they had long been critical of the red-green alliance. However, the conflict over the budget proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. What was even more influential than the differences in program content between the SDA and SDP was the fact that Lagumdžija's social democrats refused to accept a single amendment of the 10 proposed by the SDA. This solidified Tihic's determination to vote against the proposed budget. However, his party was not against the coalition, in which it wished to remain. The SDP Leader, Lagumdžija, decided to end his party's partnership with the SDA and had already found a replacement in the form of controversial media mogul Fahrudin Radoncic's Union for a Better Future of BiH (SBBBiH). As a result of a request made by the SDP leadership, Radoncic is now to become the new Minister of Security.

A Power Shift in Sarajevo?

Fahrudin Radoncic is an enigmatic figure. One would be hard pressed to identify another individual in BiH's public life about

"Zakon o policiji podjelo Vladu FBiH." Aljazeera. 28.1.2012. <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/makale/zakon-o-policiji-podijelio-vladu-fbih>.

¹¹"Zukic za otisak: Zlatko zeli drzavu za sebe." [Otisak.ba](http://www.otisak.ba). 06.06.2012. <<http://sda.ba/home/zukic-za-otisak-zlatko-zeli-drzavu-za-sebe/>>

who so many rumors are in constant circulation.¹² However, in publicly available sources, little about the allegations Radoncic is charged with is to be found. On the contrary, what is readily available is his impeccable resume. It is difficult to paint a clear picture of this individual. Born in Sandzak, in Montenegro, he is promoted on his website as a "well-known personality" and the "youngest Editor of a national newspaper in the former Yugoslavia."¹³ Just prior to the war in BiH, he founded *Avaz*, a daily newspaper and the predecessor to *Dnevni Avaz*. Today, *Dnevni Avaz* enjoys an enviable position as the most read newspaper among Bosniaks. This paper laid the foundation for Radoncic's current media empire.¹⁴ The SBBBiH was subsequently founded shortly before the national elections in October 2010. In its first go at the polls, the party managed to gain representation in the Parliament. Here, SBBBiH gained four seats at the expense of Tihic's SDA. However, the SDA remained the leading Bosniak party and a powerful force in Parliament with seven MPs. This may all change in the near future. Should Radoncic manage to take the position of Minister of Security, currently held by the SDA, he could further improve his reputation and appeal to Bosniak voters.¹⁵ He has already pledged to sell his

¹² He has been accused of keeping company with criminal elements. Radoncic has denied this and accuses "radical Islamic forces" of conducting a campaign against him. "Price o Keljmendiju plasira jedna radikalna islamska linija." [Moje Vijesti](http://www.mojevijesti.ba/novost/125478/Price-o-Keljmendiju-plasira-jedna-radikalna-islamska-linija). 07.06.2012.

<<http://www.mojevijesti.ba/novost/125478/Price-o-Keljmendiju-plasira-jedna-radikalna-islamska-linija>>.

¹³ "Biografija/politicki profil." [SBB-Savez za bolju buducnost BiH](http://www.sbbbh.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=125&Itemid=55).

<http://www.sbbbh.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=125&Itemid=55>.

¹⁴ Today, he owns numerous newspapers, magazines and a television channel.

¹⁵ He has recently demonstrated that he knows how to present himself. An agency for political communication from Sarajevo gave him excellent ratings following a televised debate.

Please see: Haber – Dobar glas!, 5.6.2012.

"Analiza javnog nastupa Fahrudina Radoncica." <<http://www.haber.ba/vijesti/bih/10819-analiza-javnog-nastupa-fahrudina-radoncica.html>>.

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newspaper upon entering the government, so as to avoid a conflict of interest. Despite these efforts, he still makes many voters uneasy. This is visible through recent analyses, which sprang up like mushrooms after a heavy rain, after the media reported that Radoncic was to become the new Minister of Security. Each of these articles attempts to shed light on the controversial businessman's past.¹⁶

However, journalists will likely proceed with caution, given Radoncic's penchant to sue for libel.¹⁷ His potential support base could be drawn from individuals especially focused on BiH's economic development. Here, Radoncic's personal economic success stories are a critical factor that he is using to his advantage. On his party's website, a detailed program focused on economic welfare and social policies is presented.¹⁸ One should exercise caution as programs are one thing and political action decidedly another.

During the 2010 campaign, Radoncic separated himself from the quite secular orientation of his party. As a result, he won the favor of the Islamic community's leadership.¹⁹ Although some of the SBBBiH's

MPs have made a good impression in Parliament thus far, one cannot help but doubt that his aspirations lie beyond the realization of proposed party goals.²⁰ The desire for a significant change in government just prior to the Municipal Elections in October is surprising. This demonstrates once again that the cooperation of the Council of Ministers is not based on enacting specific policies. Rather, it is an instrument via which power is distributed. In order for Radoncic to gain access to this club, he had to clear a final obstacle, the SDA, from his path.

The SDA wants to remain in the coalition and can defend itself by blocking the appointment of new ministers in the Parliament. While it is true that the Chairman of the Council of Ministers decides who to include in his "governing team," the final word rests with the Parliament.²¹ This institution is comprised of two chambers. These are the House of Representatives with 42 seats, and the House of Peoples. The latter seats 15 MPs. Three of the five seats reserved for the Bosniak "Constituent People" are held by Tihic's SDA. As every law must be passed by both chambers, the SDA is in a position to block the formation of a new Council of Ministers via the House of Peoples.²²

Mladen Ivanic, Chairman of the PDP, finds this unlikely. He argues that the SDA will not block the new formation given the

¹⁶ The political magazine *Slobodna Bosna* has recently dubbed Radoncic the new Minister of (In)Security. The latest magazine title is Lagumdžija-Radoncic. Savez za bolnu budućnost. Please see as well: Naser Fahrudin Keljmenđi: Ko je Ministar Signurnosti. *Dani News Magazine Sarajevo*, 8.6.2012. Nr. 782.

¹⁷ Radoncic sued Senad Avdic, a journalist, and won after claiming that the former was an "agent." "Radončić se nije pojavio na suđenju." *Moje Vijesti*. 18.12.2012.

<http://www.mojevijesti.ba/novost/24163/>, Daria Sito-Sucic. "Bosnia: Patriotic Journalism." *TOL*. 15.03.1998. <<http://www.tol.org/client/article/5096-bosnia-patriotic-journalism.html?print>>.

¹⁸ The term "Bosniak" can be found only 6 times in 82 pages, while the term "belief" is even less well-represented, being used 3 times.

<http://www.sbbbh.ba/images/stories/dokumenti/PROGRAMSKA%20DEKLARACIJA%20.pdf>.

¹⁹ The Islamic community's leader, Mustafa Cerić, denies openly supporting Radoncic and his party. However, in an interview with *Dnevni Avaz*, he called on his constituents to "accept changes." Observers categorized this as an indirect appeal

for supporting Radoncic at the polls. "Intervju: Reisu-l-ulema dr. Mustafa Cerić:

"Ne treba se bojati promjena, ne treba se plašiti novih ideja." *Dnevni Avaz*. 1.10.2010. P. 4-5.

²⁰ Quoted from Vlastimir Mijovic "(Un)natural Coalition", *BH Daily*, Nr. 2785, P.4.

²¹ For confirming the ministers in Parliament, please see Article V/4 of the BiH Constitution. <http://www.ccbh.ba/eng/article.php?pid=833&kat=518&pkat=500>.

²² If all three SDA delegates refuse to attend the meeting, the quorum necessary for voting will not be reached. For more on the quorum of the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, please see Article IV: Constitution of BiH. <http://www.ccbh.ba/eng/article.php?pid=831&kat=518&pkat=500>.

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obligation they feel to maintaining BiH at the state-level.²³ Should the SDA use its veto, a likely outcome would be a further deepening of the current political crisis and a workable template for politicians keen to seriously damage state-level governance. Here, one thinks immediately of SNSD Chairman, Milorad Dodik. However, he has thus far remained reticent. Dodik would like to see a quick end to the power struggle. The reason behind this is Dodik's need to fill empty state-level bank accounts, as the RS desperately requires funds. The entity's back is against a wall.²⁴ The longer the coalition crisis continues, the more difficult it will become to Dodik to secure access to new loans. This perspective does not represent an attractive background for holding Municipal Elections.

Croat Parties in a Position to Tip the Scales

Neither Dodik nor Lagumdžija can solve the coalition crisis alone. Both are dependent on the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ BiH). As is so oft the case in the reshuffling of power among BiH's political parties, Dragan Covic is in a unique position to tip the scales. Seats acquired via partnership with Radoncic will not fill all the empty positions left by the SDA, thus allowing the SDP and friends to form a Parliamentary majority. Here, the support of the HDZ BiH is critical.²⁵ How the balance of power is

reshuffled in the FBiH is contingent upon their allegiance.²⁶ The collapsing "Platform" coalition had long been a thorn in the HDZ BiH's side. SDP leader Lagumdžija was only able to form this coalition with the assistance of the High Representative, and the HDZ BiH was not represented.²⁷ Instead, Lagumdžija's Croat allies, the HSP and NSRzB, allowed him to ignore the HDZ BiH. Covic was left out in the cold. HDZ BiH representatives viewed this political maneuvering as a direct affront. With its junior partner, the Croatian Democratic Union 1990 (HDZ 1990), insisted that only their parties had a legitimate right to represent the Croat "Constituent People" in state-level institutions. This call was based on the HDZs' claim that they had in fact received the majority of Croat votes in the most recent Parliamentary election. For these two parties, the HSP and NSRzB are "illegitimate representatives of the Croat people." Both HDZs firmly stated that these smaller parties will not hold leadership positions in the government.²⁸

Lagumdžija will be forced to accept Covic's demands if he hopes to ally the HDZs with the SDP. Here as well, the SDA is in a position to create difficulties. In the FBiH House of Representatives, Tihić and Lagumdžija hold the most seats. The SDA has 23 and the SDP 28, out of a total of 98 respectively. The next most powerful

²³ "Ivanić: Koalicija SDP-SBB imat će velike posljedice za Bošnjake." 6.6.2012. [klix vijesti](http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/ivanic-koalicija-sdp-sbb-imat-ce-velike-posljedice-za-bosnjake/120606026), <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/ivanic-koalicija-sdp-sbb-imat-ce-velike-posljedice-za-bosnjake/120606026>.

²⁴ An indicator for the precarious situation is that Dodik, with the aid of his party's parliamentary majority, was able to ease the process via which the RS' borrows money. The opposition parties, in particular the PDP, criticized this move as a nail in the coffin for the RS. "Any additional debt is dangerous. Currently, every 5th BAM in the RS budget goes towards paying back debt...we are dependent on loans that we cannot pay back." Branislav Borenovic, PDP Deputy Chairman. Interview in *Oslobodjenje*, 23.5.2012. P. 5.

²⁵ "HDZBiH: Rekonstruirati vlast na svim nivoima." *Al Jazeera*, 6.6.2012.

<http://balkans.aljazeera.net/makale/hdzbih-rekonstruirati-vlast-na-svim-nivoima>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Sabina Wölkner, Ivana Maric: Bosnia and Herzegovina: From the Double Crisis to a Systematic Crisis. KAS-Länderbericht March 2011. <http://www.kas.de/bosnien-herzegovina/de/publications/22426/>.

^{28a} Čović: Nema mjesta za Pravaše i Boljitač. "Oslobodjenje", 6.6.2012.

<http://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/covic-nema-mjesta-za-hsp-i-ns-radom-za-boljitač>, Additionally: "Čović na čelu Parlamenta BiH." *Vijesnik.hr*, 9.2.2012. <http://www.vjesnik.hr/Article.aspx?ID=626DF8FB-1847-4E86-8628-69443BA65FC8>. However, the HDZs are aware that the support of at least one of these parties will be necessary to build the majority.

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positions are held by Radoncic (13) and the HDZ (12).²⁹ Even if Lagumdžija is able to draw Covic into a new ruling coalition, it will not be easy for Lagumdžija to show Tihic the door. It would be possible for Nermin Niksic's (SDP) government, with its Parliamentary two-thirds majority, to call a vote of no confidence. However, Lagumdžija, in alliance with his new coalition partners, does not have enough votes to do this. For this, he will need the support of one of the Croat parties Covic wishes to hold as far away from positions of power as possible, the HSP and the NSRzB. This scenario appears unlikely. However, it is not the only obstacle.

Even if Lagumdžija manages this, he will still not have reached his goal. The FBiH Presidency also has a say in the dissolution of the entity-level government. Here, the voices of Zivko Budimir (HSP) and his Vice President, Mirsad Kebo (SDA) place a critical role.

It is unlikely that both will participate in Lagumdžija's game.³⁰ Dragan Covic is thus refusing to put his cards on the table. For him it is clear that it won't be easy to change the balance of power. Before putting his relationship with the SDA on the line, Covic will want to be assured that the HDZ obtains a position in the government. He is not concerned about the state-level. There, the Croats are well-represented.³¹

²⁹ Distribution of seats in the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH.
https://www.parlament.ba/sadrzaj/domovi/predstavnicki_dom/default.aspx?id=20420&pril=b&template_id=5&langTag=en-US.

³⁰ "Ministre SDA smjenjivat će mjesecima." *Oslobodjenje*, 7.6.2012.

<http://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/ministre-sda-smjenjivat-ce-mjesecima>.

³¹ Together, the HDZs control three ministerial posts: Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees (HDZ 90), Ministry of Justice (HDZ BiH) and Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Vjekoslav Bevanda, is an HDZ BiH member.

The decisive factor is the FBiH, where the real power is distributed.³² In a number of the FBiH's cantons, the nails are already being hammered into the coffin. Four new cantonal governments have already been formed, with the SDA absent from each.³³ However, there are ten cantons in total. Such drastic power shifts will not be as easy elsewhere. It may be provisionally assumed that cantonal governments not yet affected will remain as they currently stand. The SDA has already filed complaints. They charge that governing changes were not made in accordance with the law, and are therefore illegal.³⁴

It does not appear that a new governing coalition will be formed quickly. Rather, this process will take time. Whether Lagumdžija will achieve his goal also remains unclear. Only one thing is certain: the longer the power struggle continues, the greater the risk that planned and necessary reforms will be pushed aside. These include the fulfillment of conditions that will allow the BiH's Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) to come into force. BiH ratified the SAA in 2008.³⁵ This agreement

³² The state-level enjoys few key competencies, such as foreign and monetary policy, and defense. Please see: "Responsibilities of and Relations Between the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Entities."
<http://www.ccbh.ba/eng/article.php?pid=829&kat=518&pkat=500>.

³³ These include the Sarajevo, Zenica-Doboj, Una-Sana and Tuzla Cantons.

For more information please see: Sarajevo Canton: <http://www.ks.gov.ba/node/22214>; Zenica-Doboj Canton:

<http://www.federalna.ba/bhs/vijest/28724/ministre-sda-zamijenit-ce-ministri-iz-sdp-a-sbb-a-hdz-a-bih-i-nsrzb-a>; Una-Sana Canton:

<http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15994112,00.html>; Tuzla Canton: <http://www.tip.ba/2012/06/04/foto-smijenjen-bajazit-jasarevic-i-pet-ministara-iz-sda/>.

³⁴ *SDP-u važiji stranački i osobni interesi nego interesi države BiH*, *Javno.ba*, 4. Juni 2012, <http://www.javno.ba/bih/tihi-sdp-u-vaviji-stranai-i-osobni-interesi-nego-interesi-drave-bih.html>.

³⁵ The focus is on the implementation of the verdict of the European Court of Human Rights in the Sejdic-Finci case. Please see: European Commission, Bosnia and Herzegovina Progress Report 2011.

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is required in order for country to apply for EU membership. Furthermore, it is publicly-declared priority for the Council of Ministers.³⁶ The day of reckoning will come on June 27th, when BiH's party Chairmen travel to Brussels. There, they will be tasked with explaining progress made in moving closer to SAA implementation. It will certainly be interesting to hear their answers.

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2011/package/ba_rapport_2011_en.pdf; P. 4ff.

³⁶ Interview with Vjekoslav Bevanda in the weekly magazine Slobodna Bosna. Comments from readers of the daily Dnevni Avaz. 02.17.2012. Available online at: <http://forum.dnevniavaz.ba/showthread.php?4298-Vjekoslav-Bevanda-intervju-Slobodna-Bosna>.