SLOVENIA SAYS ACCEPTING BORDER ARBITRATION WOULD FACILITATE CROATIA'S SCHENGEN ENTRY

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The Slovenian government would find it "much easier" to support Croatia's Schengen Area entry if Zagreb accepted the border arbitration ruling, President Borut Pahor said in Šibenik on Wednesday.

Speaking after meeting with Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen, Pahor said he did not wish to prejudge the Slovenian government's decision on Croatia's Schengen entry, "but I think it would probably be easier if Croatia met its obligation from the arbitration ruling."

Once the European Commission finds that Croatia meets all the Schengen criteria, its entry to the area must be supported by all member states.

"Dialogues such as these can contribute to resolving this issue...I'm not only very much in favour of this dialogue, it existed also ten years ago," Pahor said, speaking of his past cooperation, as Slovenia's prime minister, with Croatia's then PM Jadranka Kosor.

"The circumstances were demanding then, even people on both sides of the border were quarrelling. Today it's much easier and we can indeed find a solution," he said, adding that he saw no alternative to dialogue.

Grabar-Kitarović said Croatia met all the technical requirements for joining Schengen and that all inspections so far showed that this was being done in time, in line with all regulations.

"I believe in the support of all member states when a decision will be made on joining the Schengen Area as that's in everyone's interest. That would strengthen Croatia's guarding of the external border," she said.

"I'm always repeating that Croatia and Slovenia are friendly countries, that we can rise above these outstanding issues," she added.

The three presidents met in Šibenik which was the venue of the 6th annual meeting of the three countries' heads of state.

Grabar-Kitarović, Pahor and Van der Bellen also talked about the EU's future, Croatia's EU presidency in the first half of next year, the future of Southeast Europe, the Three Seas Initiative and climate change.

They supported the opening Albania's and North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration negotiations as soon as possible, as well as granting Bosnia and Herzegovina EU candidate status.

Grabar-Kitarović said they believed it was "absolutely necessary" to open negotiations with Skopje and Tirana by October.

The first meeting between the three countries' heads of state was held in March 2014 in Vienna when the then presidents Borut Pahor (Slovenia), Heinz Fischer (Austria) and Ivo Josipović (Croatia) met.

That meeting was followed up later in Logarska Dolina, Slovenia, Varaždin, Croatia, Salzburg, Austria and once again in Slovenia in Goriška Brda.

The three presidents were to have met in May. However, the meeting was deferred after the Austrian coalition government fell following a corruption scandal involving far-right Freedom party leader Heinz-Christian Strache.

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