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Slovenians say ‘yes’ to arbitration in the dispute with Croatia

On 6 June, 51.5% of Slovenians supported in a referendum an agreement with Croatia which will enable the resolution of the border dispute between the two countries through international arbitration. The result of the vote will have a positive effect not only on bilateral relations between Croatia and Slovenia but also on the process of Croatia’s accession to the EU; the unresolved dispute with Slovenia was one of the key impediments to closing accession negotiations.

The Croatian-Slovenian agreement on submitting the border dispute to international arbitration, signed on 4 November 2009, was ratified by the two countries’ parliaments. However, considering the objection against the agreement voiced by the largest representative of the opposition, the Slovenian Democratic Party, which had boycotted the vote on its ratification, the government in Ljubljana decided to hold a national referendum to decide on this issue. The agreement was intended to end the conflict over the delimitation of the land (Istria, the Sveta Gera region and the banks of the Mura and Dragonja) and the maritime (the Guld of Piran) borders between Croatia and Slovenia dating back to 1991. According to the agreement, the dispute is to be resolved through international arbitration before Croatia joins the EU. The arbitration verdict will be binding on the two countries.

The result of the referendum will make the government’s position stronger on the internal scene. Prime Minister Borut Pahor may count this as his personal success because the resolution of the conflict with Croatia has been his top priority. The end of the dispute will also contribute to improving bilateral relations, which have been strained recently. One of the major consequences of the implementation of this agreement will be putting the process of Croatia’s accession to the EU onto a faster track. <MarSz>