



BALKAN WATCH

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A Review of Current Events

HOLKERI RESIGNS. Harri Holkeri, the Finnish head of the UN Mission in Kosovo, announced his resignation May 25 after having become ill. While attending a diplomatic dinner in Strasbourg on May 13, Holkeri became ill and had to be transported to a hospital for treatment. An EU diplomat noted that the EU would check into potential successors and make a recommendation to the UN soon. Among those under consideration is Dutch diplomat Pieter Feith, current deputy director general for EU External and Politico-Military Affairs. Feith worked previously for NATO in the Balkans. Holkeri has been under criticism for failing to take action preventing wide-spread rioting in Kosovo in March. Holkeri promised to return to Kosovo to help in the transition of his successor.

MONTENEGRIN EDITOR MURDERED. Dusko Jovanovic, the editor of the daily Podgorica newspaper, Dan, was murdered on May 28. Gunmen shot him outside his office with an automatic rifle, then fled. Jovanovic had been indicted by the Hague war crimes tribunal last year for publishing the name of a protected witness in the trial of Slobodan Milosevic. The charges were dropped in April after Jovanovic published an editorial expressing remorse for his action. The head of the Journalist Association of Montenegro expressed concern that the killing would undermine freedom of speech in Montenegro, and the OSCE representative there said that free media could not survive "an atmosphere of violence and fear." Meanwhile, in Serbia Friday Ljiljana Kaspar, a columnist for the liberal and pro-Western Serbian newspaper Gradjanski List, was sentenced to six months in prison and two years probation for her writing. The same day, Momcilo Petrovic, the editor of the Belgrade newspaper Balkan, was detained by police, questioned for several hours and later released. Observers have expressed anxiety about the prospects for free media in Serbia in view of the continuing pressure from pro-nationalist authorities against the press.

SERBIAN SOCIALISTS THREATEN WITHDRAWAL FROM GOVERNMENT. Socialists within the Serbian government have threatened to end their support for the current governing coalition in protest against various actions by members of other parties within the coalition. The Socialist Party is a fervent support of Slobodan Milosevic and has supported ending the extradition of indicted war-crimes suspects to UN tribunal in The Hague. Socialist Party official Ivica Dacic claimed that his party was close to withdrawing its support. Dacic is a candidate in the Serbian presidential elections, which are to be held on June 13. He threatened that if other members of the coalition did not stop voicing their support for extraditions, his party would withdraw, thereby bringing down the government of Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica.

SERBIAN ELECTION POLLS. Latest

polling figures for the June 13 election for president of Serbia indicate that Tomislav Nikolic, the candidate of the ultra-nationalist Radical Party, holds a commanding ten-point lead over Democratic Party nominee Boris Tadic. Democratic Party of Serbia candidate Dragan Marsicanin, supported by Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica, is a close third with support nearly equal to that of Tadic. If no candidate polls at least 50 percent of the vote, a runoff between the top two vote-getters will take place June 27.

NEW U.S. AMBASSADOR TO SERBIA. Serbia-Montenegro President Svetozar Marovic on May 21 formally accepted the credentials of newly-arrived U.S. Ambassador Michael Polt, recently appointed by the United States to succeed William Montgomery.

SERBIA-MONTENEGRO, CROATIA TO COOPERATE ON EU MEMBERSHIP. Serbia-Montenegro President Svetozar Marovic announced after talks in Zagreb with Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader that the two countries have signed an agreement to work together on joining the European Union. Croatia is considered a potential new member for 2007; Serbia-Montenegro, on the other hand, has further hurdles it will have to surmount in order to be considered. The two leaders also focused on a free-trade agreement between the two countries that is to be implemented next month.

SERBS INDICTED FOR VUKOVAR MASSACRE. Eleven Serbs have been indicted recently by Serbia for involvement in the 1991 massacre at the Croat town of Vukovar. Around 200 prisoners of war were killed in the massacre. The Serbs are being tried in Serbia. Six other Serb soldiers have already been indicted and are also awaiting trial. The Hague tribunal has agreed that Serbia can try lower-level officials reportedly involved in war crimes. The trials will serve as a further test of the independence of the Serb judiciary and the willingness of Serbian society to come to terms with its ethnic cleansing policies during the wars of the Milosevic era. Serbian nationalist politicians oppose the extradition of indicated war criminals to The Hague.

CROATIAN GENERAL INDICTED. The Hague tribunal announced that Croat General Mirko Norac has been indicted for leading an attack in 1993 on the Medak Pocket, a small area of Croatia where several hundred ethnic Serbs once lived. Norac is already serving a 12-year sentence, imposed by a Croatian court, for other war crimes. Norac's unit reportedly burned a woman alive, in an attempt to pressure other Serbs into leaving the area.

BOSNIAN SERB PRESIDENT SUPPORTS ACTION OVER SREBRENICA. Dragan Cavic, president of the Bosnian Serb Republic, stated that action against war criminals implicated in the 1995 massacre of Srebrenica is needed. Cavic acknowledged that his

government has not cooperated sufficiently with the Hague tribunal, a prerequisite for membership in NATO's Partnership for Peace. Bosnian Serb Republic Vice President Ivan Tomljenovic told a Sarajevo newspaper that indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic was hiding in the ethnic Serb region of Bosnia and evading capture with the help of some Bosnian Serb police. NATO officials have reiterated that further cooperation is needed from Bosnian Serbs, in order to consider Bosnian membership in the Partnership for Peace. Bosnia had hoped for an invitation to join at the partnership's summit to be held in late June in Istanbul.

NATO TO REDUCE FORCES IN BOSNIA. The U.S. announced that NATO would reduce its forces in Bosnia by 500 troops this month. SFOR will also be reorganized, with brigades being renamed "task forces." Lapreze noted that overall security in Bosnia has improved greatly since the war ended in 1995. Additionally, Bosnian Defense Minister Miroslav Nikolic announced that his government would also be reducing its troop strength this month, from 13,200 to 8,000 soldiers. One of SFOR's responsibilities is to monitor the reduction of Bosnian forces. The new task forces will be stationed in various communities, exchanging information with and providing assistance to local authorities.

QUOTABLE QUOTES:

"Montenegro [is] dissatisfied with the very costly union with Serbia, the expense which seriously threatens the budget of Montenegro and Serbia too. And Serbia and Montenegro are obviously now considering what is the pragmatic value of the union."—Montenegrin President Filip Vujanovic (*Montenegrin TV*, 5/23/04).

"I am convinced that a common state of Serbia and Montenegro has a future—but not this one imposed on us by Brussels. It has no future except those three years we agreed on—and this is the worst-case scenario."—Serbia-Montenegro Ambassador to Rome, Branko Lukovac (*BBC*, 5/22/04).

"The order of things for NATO is war criminals first and PFP later, not the other way around."—NATO Secretary-General Jan de-Hoop Scheffer, at a news conference following a meeting with Bosnia's three-person presidency (*Reuters*, 5/28/04).

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