

BALKAN WATCH

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A Review of Current Events

KOSOVO VIOLENCE, SERBIAN RESPONSE, INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS. At least 31 ethnic Serbs and Albanians were killed and nearly 600 people injured in violence that began March 17 in Mitrovica and spread throughout Kosovo. The injured included 61 international peacekeepers. The violence began after three Albanian children were drowned in the Ibar River, reportedly after being attacked by Serbs. A demonstration at the bridge in Mitrovica separating the city into northern (Serb) and southern (Albanian) sections escalated into violence that quickly overwhelmed international peacekeepers. UNMIK chief Harri Holkeri claimed that ethnic Albanian extremists then organized attacks against several Serb villages and sites in Pristina itself, in which over 100 homes and 16 Serbian Orthodox churches were destroyed. By the weekend, nearly 1,000 Serbs were being protected in KFOR and UNMIK compounds. Demonstrators also focused their anger on the UN authorities and several Kosovo political leaders, including President Ibrahim Rugova. NATO sent additional forces into Kosovo, including units from the U.S., Britain, France, Germany and Italy.

Kosovo Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi took the lead in seeking an end to the violence. He was reportedly fired on by snipers while urging a crowd of Albanians to desist from further violence but did not waver. On Saturday, he announced that the government would establish a fund to compensate the victims of the attacks. Agim Ceku, the leader of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), consisting of former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), also spoke out publicly in support of ending the violence and sent KPC units into several Serb areas to prevent further anti-Serb violence. KPC efforts were successful wherever they were deployed. Former KLA leader Hashim Thaci, now leader of the PDK party, cut short a visit to the U.S. and returned to Kosovo to help stop the violence. Many observers commented that President Rugova and his majority LDK party had been marginalized by the violence.

Authorities in Belgrade and Serbs around the country reacted harshly to the violence in Kosovo, which Serbs regard as the cradle of Serbian civilization. Mosques and Muslim buildings in Belgrade, Nis and other Serbian cities were burned and Muslims attacked, as Serbian nationalists threatened Muslims with "slaughter and death." A Belgrade crowd stoned the U.S. embassy and reportedly sacked the Croatian embassy. Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica called for an end to the violence in

Kosovo and Serbia and appealed for the partition of Kosovo.

Russian leader Vladimir Putin denounced the Kosovo violence as "ethnic cleansing" of Serbs and sent a cabinet minister to Belgrade for consultations with the Serbs. Some EU officials called for efforts to revive the policy of "standards before status," which delays talks on Kosovo's final status until a checklist of international demands are met, including the protection and return of the Serb minority community. Former Swedish prime minister and peace envoy to the Balkans, Carl Bildt, said the principle of multiethnic states was under attack. Other Europeans blamed the violence in part on the failure of the international community to help Kosovo address final status issues since the end of the NATO war nearly five years ago in June 1999. Former Bosnia high representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, called for urgent attention to be given to address Kosovo's final status. Former KFOR commander General Klaus Reinhardt, pointing to the fact that the violence involved mostly young unemployed men, told German radio that lack of a political decision on Kosovo's future would also mean no privatization, no foreign investment and no new jobs. Former U.S. Balkans negotiator and organizer of the Dayton peace conference, Richard Holbrooke, said he had predicted such violence a year ago and added that delaying final status would be a mistake that would increase tensions and increase the danger of further violence. Former diplomat and Carnegie Endowment president Morton Abramowitz wrote Friday that, "The failure to establish Kosovo statehood creates massive uncertainty in the Balkans, exacerbates tensions between Albanians and Serbs, delays investment and growth, and keeps Serbia focused on the past."

CRVENKOVSKI NOMINATED FOR PRESIDENCY. Macedonian Prime Minister Boris Crvenkovski was nominated by his Social Democratic Alliance party to run in the April 14 election to fill the vacancy created by the death of President Boris Trajkovski. Five other candidates are running for the Macedonian presidency, including two ethnic Albanians.

BOSNIAN SERB APPOINTED DEFENSE MINISTER. The Bosnian parliament appointed its first-ever defense minister, Nikola Radovanovic. Radovanovic, a Bosnian Serb, will have two deputies, Enes Becirbasic, a Bosnian Muslim, and Merina Pendes, a Bosnian Croat. Radovanovic's goal is to prepare the Bosnian military to join NATO's

Partnership for Peace program, possibly in June. In order to join, though, the Bosnian military will have to fulfill a checklist of requirements, necessitating compromises among Bosnia's three main ethnic groups.

Meanwhile, Bosnian Serb authorities are still searching for war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic. Authorities had received tips that he was crossing the border between Bosnia and Serbia.

DJINDJIC ASSASSINATION WITNESS MURDERED. Kuro Krijestorac, a Belgrade businessman, was murdered on March 1, according to Judge Maja Kojacevic, head of the Special Court in Belgrade. Krijestorac was scheduled to testify for the prosecution in the trial regarding the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic one year ago. Krijestorac reportedly was on a nearby street where snipers shot at and killed the prime minister; he saw the alleged sharpshooter, Zvezdan Jovanovic, and accomplices enter and leave the building from which they carried out their crime. Rajko Danilovic, lawyer for the Djindjic family, stated that the murder would not significantly affect the case, because of a sworn statement delivered by Krijestorac to prosecutors.

SERB COURT SENTENCES POLICEMAN FOR KOSOVO WAR CRIMES. Sasa Cvjetan, former member of a special police unit operating in Kosovo during the 1999 NATO-Serbian war, was given 20 years in prison by a Belgrade court for his role in the massacre of 14 Kosovar women and children in Podujevo in March 1999. Albanian survivors had been flown in to testify in the trial. The UN tribunal in The Hague has permitted the trials of lower-level perpetrators accused of war crimes to take place in Serbia, while reserving the right to try more senior officials itself.

Meanwhile, a trial in Serbia recently opened in an effort to prosecute those involved with a 1991 massacre in which ethnic Serbs reportedly killed 192 rival Croats at a pig farm in Vukovar, Croatia. Natasa Kandic, head of a watchdog legal group in Belgrade noted that if the trial is conducted properly, the Hague tribunal may be more willing to allow Serbs charged with war crimes to be tried in Serbia. Already, six lower-level participants from the massacre are being tried in Serbia, under permission from the tribunal.

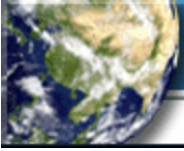
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Quotable Quotes

"The violence is not likely to end until the West stops relying on failed assumptions about a multiethnic Kosovo, a united Serbia-Montenegro-Kosovo and the power of the EU to resolve all difficult political issues in the Balkans. That requires the West to focus now on the final status of Kosovo before extremists of all stripes take over."—Morton Abramowitz (*Washington Post*, 3/19/04).

"Decisive steps have to be taken now. Clarity on what Kosovo's status is needs to be determined. This is the duty of the United Nations and the international community."—Former High Representative to Bosnia Wolfgang Petritsch (*Reuters*, 3/20/04).

"We strongly condemn acts of destruction of cultural and religious sites, such as churches or monasteries. The government has decided to create a special fund for reconstruction of all buildings destroyed in the past few days."—Kosovo prime minister Bajram Rexhepi (*Reuters*, 3/20/04).



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