



BALKAN WATCH

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A Review of Current Events

CRVENKOVSKI WINS MACEDONIAN PRESIDENCY. Macedonian Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski won the run-off presidential election held April 28, obtaining nearly 63 percent of the total vote, while his opponent Sasho Kedev won the remaining 37 percent. Approximately 53 percent of eligible voters participated in the election, to name a successor to President Boris Trajkovski, killed in a plane crash in February. Kedev announced that he would be filing a complaint against election fraud, but international observers noted that the election met international standards despite some irregularities in rural areas.

MACEDONIAN EXECUTIONS. Macedonian police have accused former Interior Minister Ljube Boskovski of ordering the murder of seven Pakistani illegal immigrants and depicting the victims as terrorist adherents of an ethnic Albanian guerrilla organization who were eliminated in support of the U.S. war against terror. Five former ministry officials and a Macedonian businessman were accused of participating in the killings. The U.S. State Department had pressed for an inquiry. Boskovski is reportedly also under investigation for war crimes that he was involved with during Macedonia's ethnic fighting in 2001.

UNMIK LEGAL DECISION SPARKS KOSOVO CONTROVERSY. An UNMIK prosecutor announced on April 28 that he could find no evidence linking Serbs to the drowning of three Albanian children in March, an incident that led to the worst outbreak of violence in Kosovo since the end of the war in June 1999. A thirteen-year-old Kosovo Albanian, Fitim Veseli told media that a group of Serb men and their dogs had chased him, his brother, and two of their friends to the Ibar River. Fitim was able to swim across the river to safety. The bodies of their two friends were found later down-river, while his brother has yet to be found.

The UNMIK report noted that the river was "narrow, but swollen with runoff, turbulent and extremely fast flowing. On the day in question, it was also cold. It can only be concluded that something other than free will caused the children to enter the river... The prosecutor is of the opinion that the evidence does not support a grounded suspicion of the commission of a criminal act." The father of both the surviving and missing boys said he was "very disappointed with the investigation and the report."

ICG WARNING ON KOSOVO. A report issued by the International Crisis Group on April 22 titled "Collapse in Kosovo" warns about the current situation there, suggesting that the international community reconsider its positions on final status. The report warns that Kosovo could become "Europe's West Bank" if the problems are not addressed properly. According to the report, NATO and international efforts to address problems in Kosovo have lost their ability to be effective because of ongoing strife and an increasing view of international weakness by the Albanian and Serb parties within Kosovo. The report offers various suggestions on how to improve the ability of all parties to negotiate and solve the problem of violence in Kosovo.

PATTEN ADDRESSES BUNDESTAG. In a speech titled "Western Balkans: Road to Europe," given April 28 to the European Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag, European Commissioner Christopher Patten discussed EU relations with the Western Balkans and the vital role that Europe should play in improving conditions in the region. Patten noted how events in the Balkans have an ability to affect the rest of Europe. Albania, for example, has major problems with corruption and black markets; he noted that Albanian crime can infiltrate into Europe. Patten noted that Bosnian democracy is undergoing some challenges that need to be addressed and that Europe will not allow Bosnia, as a country and democracy, to fail.

Patten stated that the international position on "standards before status" in Kosovo was "clear" but that it "belongs in Europe" regardless of the final status. He also discussed the issue of Macedonia, which held its presidential election run-off this past week. He noted that the country has come a long way since the Lake Ohrid Agreement and that further work will be necessary to prepare the country for potential EU membership, after the country submitted its application to the EU this year. Patten also noted the importance of the EU's decision on Croatia, meaning that other Balkan countries would be eligible to join the EU once certain reforms are made.

SERBIAN PARLIAMENT APPROVES KOSOVO SERB AUTONOMY PLAN. The Serbian Parliament voted on April 29 to approve an autonomy plan for Kosovo's ethnic Serbs, who make up less than 10 percent of Kosovo's popula-

tion. The plan calls for creation of five Serb regions with their own police, judiciary and social organizations. Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica claimed that the plan envisages "a decentralization of power in Kosovo" along the lines of earlier agreements affecting Bosnia and Macedonia. The EU was strongly critical of an earlier and similar version of the autonomy plan, terming it a code for partition of Kosovo.

SERBIAN INDICTEE PAVKOVIC REFUSES TO SURRENDER. Former Serbian general Nebojsa Pavkovic stated to media that he felt he had done nothing wrong in the war in Kosovo in 1999. Pavkovic is currently under pressure from the Serbian foreign and defense ministers to surrender to the UN Tribunal at The Hague.

SERBIAN AUTHORITIES REMOVE BUGGING DEVICES FROM FOREIGN MINISTER'S HOME. On April 26, the Serb secret police announced that they had removed several such devices from the home of Vuk Draskovic. The foreign minister said he did not believe that all bugs had been removed, and his wife suggested that the house would have to be demolished to remove all bugging mechanisms.

EU FORCE TO REPLACE SFOR IN BOSNIA. On April 26 EU foreign ministers agreed that an EU military force would replace the NATO-led SFOR. The 7,000 soldiers would be commanded by Britain when it takes over later this year. The plan must still be formally approved this month at the Istanbul NATO summit.

SFOR REJECTS WAR CRIMES SUSPECTS. NATO's Stabilization Force in Bosnia announced that it had banned four war crimes suspects from leadership positions in the joint military it is helping to create in the country. The army will consist of Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs. The four rejectees included three Muslims and a Croat. Of the eight approved by NATO, five of them were Bosnian Serbs. Establishment of a joint force is a prerequisite for participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace program. Bosnian presidency chairman Sulejman Tihic protested the decision, noting that one of the four had been cleared of all charges.

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Quotable Quotes

"Things between NATO and the EU have improved. Things are going much better. The U.S. has enough to think about besides worrying about every single detail being worked out by the EU."—EU diplomat commenting on plans to replace NATO's SFOR with an EU force in Bosnia (*Financial Times*, 4/27/04).

"If the underlying causes of the violence are not dealt with immediately and directly—through political, developmental and security measures alike—Kosovo risks becoming Europe's West Bank."—International Crisis Group report, "Collapse in Kosovo" (4/23/04).

"The people of the Western Balkans are our fellow Europeans. We cannot wash our hands of them. Let us remember the consequences of our refusal to get involved."—Commissioner Chris Patten, speaking to a committee of the German Bundestag (4/28/04).