



# BALKAN WATCH

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## A Review of Current Events

**HARADINAJ INDICTED, RESIGNS, TURNS SELF IN TO TRIBUNAL.** Following his indictment by the Hague tribunal, Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj announced March 8 to members of his government and people of Kosovo that he was resigning and would fly to The Hague the following day to surrender to authorities. He was charged with various war crimes committed against non-Albanians in the 1998-1999 war against Serbia over Kosovo, when he served as commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army's (KLA) western sector in Kosovo. Altogether, there were 37 charges listed against Haradinaj. Two other Kosovars were indicted with him, Lahi Brahimaj and Idriz Balaj. In a statement accompanying his resignation, Haradinaj insisted that he was "innocent of any crime I am charged with." His dignified acceptance of the rule of law brought widespread praise from his countrymen and the international community and frequent contrasts with the failure by indicted Serb officials to comply with the tribunal's summons. Kosovo President Ibrahim Rugova praised Haradinaj for resigning, describing his resignation and voluntary surrender to the tribunal as "patriotic." UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also praised Haradinaj for cooperating with the tribunal.

Despite strong feelings expressed by many Kosovars that the indictment was engineered by Belgrade and marked an attempt by some in the international community to de-legitimize the KLA, the populace has completely eschewed violence so far, with many Kosovars opting instead to peacefully protest the indictment. Haradinaj appeared before the tribunal March 14 to formally hear the presentation of charges. He has pled not guilty to all counts.

In anticipation of violence, NATO had increased its troop presence in KFOR on the eve of the indictment. Around 600 German and 500 British troops were added to the peacekeeping mission already on the ground there. NATO commander in Kosovo, Lieutenant General Yves De Kermabon of France, warned ethnic Albanians not to respond violently to the indictment, urging them to "show your will to live in peace, as a mature, democratic society." NATO reserve forces will also be participating in rehearsals of Determined Effort 2005, an exercise intended to prepare troops in case they are needed to stop rioting or other fighting in Kosovo and the Balkans region.

Kosovars must now turn to the task of selecting a new prime minister. Haradinaj urged that one of his colleagues in his AAK party, Bajram Kosumi, replace him as prime minister. However, strong pressure was building for PDK leader and former KLA commander Hashem Thaci to be appointed to the position. President Rugova assured people that there would be no "vacuum" left by the resignation of Haradinaj and a new government would be in place soon. Rugova may have been responding partly to

remarks made by UNMIK head Soren Jessen-Petersen, who noted that Haradinaj's departure would "leave a big gap" in Kosovo.

**NEW KOSOVO LIBERATION ARMY.** On March 3, a Pristina newspaper published a "communiqué" from an allegedly new "Albanian Liberation Army" in Kosovo, claiming to be an amalgam of the KLA, the liberation army of Presevo, and ethnic Albanian guerrillas in Macedonia. In an apparent reference to the rumored pending indictment of Haradinaj, the communiqué warned against efforts by the Hague tribunal to undermine the Albanians' liberation struggle.

**TALKS BETWEEN SERBIA AND KOSOVO POSTPONED.** Talks scheduled between Serbia and Kosovo to discuss the fate of people missing from the 1998-1999 war have been postponed, as a result of the Haradinaj indictment. Neeraj Singh, a spokesman for UNMIK, stated that the Kosovo government asked the UN to delay the beginning of the talks for a week. The talks had been scheduled to begin in Belgrade on March 10 and were organized by the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross. Over 3,200 individuals are left unaccounted for.

**MACEDONIAN LOCAL ELECTIONS SUCCESSFUL.** In a major test of the power-sharing arrangements agreed between Macedonia's ethnic Slavs and Albanians, elections for town councils and mayors took place almost without incident throughout the country on March 13. Turnout was estimated at 55 percent. Mayors have been given new powers over local education, policing and taxation. A spokesman for the ruling Social Democrats said, "We are satisfied with the way the election went."

**BOSNIA WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL.** High Representative Paddy Ashdown, accompanied by the Hague tribunal president and chief prosecutor, inaugurated the War Crimes Chamber of the Court of Bosnia in Sarajevo on March 9. It is the first court in the former Yugoslavia to try war crimes that took place during Bosnia's independence struggle.

**CROATIA DEADLINE MARCH 17.** A deadline for Croatia to capture war crimes indictee General Ante Gotovina was previously set for March 17. Recently, chief UN war crimes prosecutor Carla Del Ponte wrote a letter to EU officials criticizing the Croatian government for insufficient cooperation with the tribunal for failure to capture Gotovina. His capture has been the primary obstacle blocking Croatia from beginning accession talks for membership in the EU with Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. At this point, it is likely talks will be postponed, diminishing the possibility Croatia will be able to join in 2007. Croatian President Stipe Mesic warned Croatians to cooperate with the tribunal, urging them not to

think in terms of Gotovina or the European Union, but rather consider the necessity of cooperation to avoid isolation. Members of the Serb community in Croatia have called upon the EU to put pressure on Croatia to improve treatment of minorities and facilitate refugee returns.

**RUPEL ON FUTURE OF OSCE; BALKANS.** OSCE Chairman-in-Office and Foreign Minister of Slovenia Dimitrij Rupel spoke on the future of the OSCE and the Balkans at a recent speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington. Dr. Rupel stressed that his organization needs to do more to protect minorities and promote the rule of law and economic development in Kosovo. He urged Kosovo Serbs to participate more in the political process and declared that the "level of trust" between the Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo needs to be improved. Rupel said that he expected the review of Kosovo "standards" to be completed by September, allowing for final status talks to begin shortly thereafter. When asked about pending discussions over the future of the state union between Serbia and Montenegro, Rupel noted that the OSCE would "accept the result of any democratic process."

## QUOTABLE QUOTES:

"I am a person of Kosova and I willingly sacrifice myself for my country. So, I accept this burden. At the same time, I ask all of you to accept this fact. I ask all of you to accept something that is almost impossible to accept but do this in order to do your country and your nation an honor. I ask that you think about the greater interest of the country."—Former Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, announcing he was resigning to face war crimes charges at The Hague (*BBC*, 3/8/05).

"The decision announced by Mr. Haradinaj to cooperate with the Tribunal, despite his firm conviction of innocence, and although painful for him, his family, Kosovo and for his many friends and partners, including in UNMIK, is at the same time an example of Kosovo's growing political maturity as a responsible member of the international community."—UNMIK head Soren Jessen-Petersen (*Press Release*, 3/8/05).

"Haradinaj has done a greater service to Kosovo by encouraging his people to accept the rule of international law than any action he could have taken by staying in office. As a result, Kosovo may now be nearer to international acceptance of eventual independent status."—Former British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook (*The Guardian*, 3/11/05).

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