



BALKAN WATCH

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A Review of Current Events

MESIC WINS CROATIAN PRESIDENCY. Stipe Mesic was reelected Croatia's president by a wide margin in yesterday's second round of voting. According to official results announced by the country's Electoral Commission, Mesic won nearly 66 percent of the votes. Mesic faced conservative Deputy Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor. A major point of contention in the election was the status of indicted war criminal General Ante Gotovina, believed by many in the EU and international community to be hiding in Croatia. Mesic ran on a platform of bringing Croatia into the EU, setting 2008 as a target date for Croatian accession. In the initial round of voting on January 2, Mesic won a plurality of the vote, achieving 48.9 percent; Croatian law requires that the winner obtain at least 50 percent of the votes. Kosor came in a distant second place and has been hurt by scandals within her own party, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Mesic, running as an independent candidate, has enjoyed the support of centrist parties. Kosor was supported by Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, who has attempted to give the HDZ the image of a mainstream, center-right European party.

GOTOVINA COMPROMISE OFFER. The Chicago-based attorney of indicted Croatian war criminal General Ante Gotovina announced that Gotovina would be willing to surrender to authorities if international officials would allow his trial to be held in Croatia, instead of at The Hague. Luka Misetic announced Gotovina's compromise offer in a letter to prosecutors. The prosecution spokeswoman at The Hague, Florence Hartmann, stated that the prosecution would be unwilling to accept Gotovina's offer. Misetic has refused to shed light on how he has maintained contact with Gotovina. EU officials have made the capture and extradition of Gotovina a requirement of Croatia's EU membership. Hartmann noted, however, that the tribunal would be willing to consider Gotovina's request to be tried in Croatia, although he would be required to surrender to the Hague tribunal first.

U.S. AID CUT TO SERBIA. The State Department announced January 13 that it was withholding \$10 million from U.S. assistance to Serbia in 2005 as a result of lack of cooperation by Belgrade with the Hague tribunal. The State Department noted that this was in addition to \$16 million that had been withheld from the 2004 Serbian assistance budget. According to the State Department, since the withholding of some aid last year, "there has been no improvement" in Belgrade's cooperation with the tribunal. The total aid package for Serbia this year had previously been set at \$73.6 million, which was aimed at providing assistance to "organizations and programs outside of the central government that are committed to reform."

DJUKANOVIC REAFFIRMS INTENTION TO SEEK INDEPENDENCE. Montenegrin

Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic emphasized on January 4 that he believes in Montenegro's independence from Serbia "more than ever" and that he would hold a referendum on the issue. He did not indicate when the vote would be held. EU officials continue to exert pressure on Montenegro to remain in the union with Serbia.

UNMIK CHIEF ANNOUNCES KOSOVO FINAL STATUS TALKS TO BEGIN THIS YEAR. Soren Jessen-Petersen declared on January 4 that final status talks would begin in 2005, if there was a positive assessment of progress made on "standards before status" by mid-year, but he did not promise that negotiations would end this year. He added that his priorities for 2005 were progress on standards and the economy. He also outlined issues that would be discussed with Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica when the two meet in Belgrade on January 17.

Meanwhile, Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj expressed confidence to reporters that Kosovo's final status would be clarified this year. Haradinaj, a former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) commander, has been questioned by UN war crimes investigators for his role in the conflict.

OSCE URGES MORE KOSOVO SERB POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT. Dimitrij Rupel, Slovenian Foreign Minister and current OSCE chairman, encouraged Kosovo Serbs to participate more actively in the political process as a means of ensuring their rights are protected in the eventual process of creating a final status solution for Kosovo. Rupel also asked Kosovo Albanians to "offer the hand of collaboration to the Serbian community."

UNMIK OFFICER KILLED. UN officials confirmed that a Nigerian police officer had died as a result of an explosion in Kosovo. The officer's car apparently was caught in a blast at a shopping center in Prizren. Some reports suggest that an explosive device was placed underneath the car.

NATIONALIST NAMED BOSNIAN SERB PRIME MINISTER. Bosnian Serb President Dragan Cavic announced that Pero Bukejlovic of the ruling nationalist party would become the next prime minister. Cavic's move comes after the December resignation of Prime Minister Dragan Mikerevic, who protested international sanctions against the Bosnian Serb government for its failure to arrest war crimes suspects. Bukejlovic is a mechanical engineer and a member of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), founded in the early 1990s by war crimes indictee Radovan Karadzic. Bukejlovic promised to work toward political stability in the Bosnian Serb Republic and to attempt to resolve social problems. As the new prime minister-designate, Bukejlovic has 40 days to propose his cabinet.

BOSNIAN SERB WAR CRIMES INDICTEE SURRENDERS. Savo Todovic, an indicted former commander of a prison camp in the Bosnian town of Foca, surrendered to authorities January 15 and was immediately transferred to the UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague. He had been charged with 18 counts of crimes against humanity, violations of the laws and customs of war, and grave breaches of international conventions. The indictment noted that he had been "in charge of selecting detainees for killings, beatings, interrogations, force labor, solitary confinement, and exchanges."

WAR CRIMES CASE OVERTURNED. The Serbian Supreme Court overturned a prison sentence imposed by a lower court on a Serb police officer found guilty of executing 14 Kosovo Albanians during the 1998-99 Kosovo War. Sasa Cvjetan's case was ordered to be retried before the same lower court where he was initially convicted. His lawyers claimed a victory in achieving the decision, saying that his rights had been violated during the trial because he had been interrogated without their presence.

TRIBUNAL SUGGESTS MILOSEVIC CALL MLADIC. At The Hague trial of former Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic, Judge Patrick Robinson suggested that Milosevic ask Bosnian Serb indictee Ratko Mladic to testify in Milosevic's defense. Milosevic politely declined the suggestion, noting that if Mladic were to testify, then he would also have to surrender to the tribunal, which is seeking his arrest for war crimes in Bosnia. In recent days, Judge Robinson has criticized Milosevic for calling witnesses irrelevant to his case.

QUOTABLE QUOTES:

"Brussels told us: We were patient with you, but we no longer will be. Europe will not wait for us and there will be no one else to blame but ourselves for the isolation."—Serbia and Montenegro Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic, commenting on the need for Belgrade to cooperate with the Hague tribunal as a condition for joining the EU (*AP*, 1/9/05).

"We call on the authorities in Belgrade to cooperate fully with the Tribunal by arresting and transferring fugitive indictees, particularly Ratko Mladic, to face justice in The Hague."—Department of State spokesman Richard Boucher, announcing aid cuts to Serbia (*Department of State Press Release* 1/13/05).

"The only option and possibility to fulfill the wishes of Kosovo people is independence of Kosovo. By the year-end it will be clear, and I believe, accomplished."—Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj (*AFP*, 1/12/05).

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