



BALKAN WATCH

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A Review of Current Events

IMF WARNS SERBIA. The International Monetary Fund warned Serbian officials that Serbia and Montenegro's loan package from the international organization later this year would be jeopardized if the country did not step up economic reforms to improve the country's economy. Should the IMF withdraw its loans to Serbia & Montenegro, the country would stand to lose assistance from the Paris Club of creditors, which has written off much of the country's debt. Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica received two public complaints from the IMF, which criticized Serbia for not working sufficiently to privatize NIS, the state gas and oil company, and to reform Serbia's troubled pensions system. Harald Hirschhofer, IMF representative in Belgrade, announced that fund officials would know by the beginning of November whether they would move ahead with the loans.

MADRID SUSPECT ARRESTED IN BELGRADE. Serbian officials announced that Abdelmajid Bouchar, a 22-year-old Moroccan wanted in connection with the March 2004 Madrid train bombings, had been arrested in Belgrade. Bouchar was arrested in late June, aboard a train in Belgrade, traveling from northern Serbia. Officials noted that he was not carrying identification on him at the time. He originally told Serbian officials he was from Iraq; however, they turned to investigators at Interpol, who recently were able to determine his identity and warn Serbian officials he was wanted in Spain. Serbian Interior Minister Dragan Jovic described the investigation as a positive example of Serbia's cooperation with the international community and with Spain, which plans to seek Bouchar's extradition to face trial in Madrid.

SESELJ TESTIFIES FOR MILOSEVIC DEFENSE. Former chairman of the Serbian Radical Party Vojislav Seselj testified recently for the defense in former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's trial at the UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague. Seselj used his testimony to argue that the war over Kosovo at the end of the 1990s was just a plot by Western nations, including the United States, to "serve as a pretext" for stationing American troops on Yugoslav territory. Seselj denied that Serbs had done anything wrong leading up to the conflict. He also used the opportunity to berate the current Serbian government and political parties that arose after Milosevic's fall from power as traitorous, drawing parallels between Kostunica's government and the mafia. Seselj, himself, assisted in the founding of various Serbian paramilitary groups believed responsible for having carried out atrocities in Croatia, Kosovo, and Bosnia. He maintained that his Serbian Radical Party was the only political group in Serbia that advocated a "Greater Serbia" after World War II.

Milosevic's legal advisor Branko Rakic told reporters that Seselj, because of his long tenure within the Serbian and Yugoslav governments, is able to provide a great deal of information regarding events related to the charges. Seselj, having taught as a professor at one point at the University of Michigan, is also being held on war crimes charges at by the tribunal.

HOWARD DEAN ATTENDS HUMAN RIGHTS MEETING IN BOSNIA. Howard Dean, former presidential candidate and now chairman of the Democratic National Committee, recently attended a summit on conflict resolution, reconciliation, and human rights in Sarajevo. Participants in the conference had the opportunity to evaluate case studies of various international conflicts, including those in East Timor and Northern Ireland. Sponsored by the United Nations Development Program, the four-day meeting was held in Sarajevo because of ongoing research being undertaken to help Bosnia and the rest of the former Yugoslavia move forward after a violent recent history.

KARADZIC SUPPORTER EXTRADITED TO BOSNIA. Momcilo Mandic, seen as a supporter of wanted war criminal Radovan Karadzic, was arrested in Montenegro and extradited recently to Bosnia, where he is now being held in a prison in Sarajevo. Mandic has been living in Montenegro for the past several years. In 2004, High Representative Paddy Ashdown closed a bank run by Mandic, as part of a move designed to freeze the assets of various supporters of Karadzic. Ashdown has accused Mandic of financing Karadzic's run from the law, while also providing him with intelligence and logistical support. Mandic is one of various individuals believed to be supporters of war crimes indictees who have been barred from entry into the European Union and the United States.

REPEAT ELECTIONS HELD IN ALBANIAN DISTRICTS. Officials held repeat elections on Sunday in three districts in Albania, which were determined to have suffered voting irregularities in the original parliamentary election held in July. President Alfred Moisiu announced he would not convene the new parliament until election results had been certified in the entire country. Prior to the vote, the repeat elections were not believed likely to substantially alter results attained in July, when it became clear that former Albanian President Sali Berisha would win the prime minister position. Previously a cardiologist, Berisha served as president from 1992 to 1997, and was forced to resign after the collapse of a Ponzi investments pyramid. Ninety international observers monitored the re-vote in the three districts.

KOSOVO OMBUDSMAN CRITICIZES UN. Marek Antoni Nowicki, ombudsman in Kosovo, has criticized UN and local police for their actions in handling the members of a youth activist group, the Kosovo Action Network. The activist group has supported full independence and sovereignty for Kosovo, while also opposing talks with Serbia. Police have gotten into a number of brawls with members of the group, led by Albin Kurti, a Kosovar jailed by Serbian officials prior to and during the war in the late 1990s. Nowicki stated that the members of the organization have expressed their viewpoints within the limits of the law.

MACEDONIA ON COURSE TO EU. Following a meeting with Macedonian Foreign Minister Ilinka Mitreva, European Parliament Deputy Angelika Beer told reporters that Macedonia appears to be on the right path toward accession with the EU, having successfully carried out the goal of implementing the Lake Ohrid Agreement, which was intended to improve relations between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. Beer and EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn have both commented that Macedonia's hope of joining the EU has not been impeded by French and Dutch "no" votes on the European Constitution, held earlier this summer. Beer also downplayed the conflict between Macedonia and Greece regarding Macedonia's formal name, stating that Germany and the EU would be negotiating with Macedonia, not with its name.

QUOTABLE QUOTES:

"The situation is even more complicated than under Milosevic. The world now views the government as democratic, but all key pillars of Milosevic's regime are being rehabilitated."—Veran Matic, head of Serbia's independent B92 television and radio station, on the efforts by Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica to re-legitimize elements of the former Slobodan Milosevic regime (*AP*, 8/17/05).

"Such a vacuum of power is dangerous and damaging for the country, its economy, public order, administration, reforms. But, on the other side, there seems to be a very positive phenomenon this time—a peaceful transfer of power, which never happened in post-communist Albania."—Analyst Remzi Lani, on repeat elections held Sunday after irregularities in the original vote in July (*AP*, 8/19/05).

"The program is essentially off track."—Harald Hirschhofer, IMF representative in Belgrade, on the failure of Serbia's economic reform efforts (*Financial Times*, 8/13/05).

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