



BALKAN WATCH

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A Review of Current Events

MERKEL CALLS FOR KOSOVO STATUS NEGOTIATIONS. Angela Merkel recently visited Kosovo to meet with German military forces stationed there. Merkel is the leader of the German Christian Democratic Union and leading opposition candidate expected to win the chancellor position in Bundestag elections scheduled for September. Merkel praised Kosovo for economic and political progress made in the past six years. She stated that her country supports the UN review process launched recently by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Annan had appointed envoy Kai Eide to lead a review process to evaluate Kosovo's progress on making reforms. Merkel stated that Germans share a common position on holding talks to discuss Kosovo's progress and then to determine final political status. Merkel did not make clear how her position on Kosovo and the Balkans would differ from Gerhard Schroeder, the incumbent chancellor. Merkel urged compromise from each side in the Kosovo dispute. Merkel, born in the former East Germany, is the daughter of an evangelical minister. She worked as a physicist before becoming involved in politics immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall. She worked her way up through party ranks, serving within former Chancellor Helmut Kohl's government. Should she be elected, her government is not expected to drastically alter German foreign policy toward the Balkans.

SOLANA WARNS KOSOVO ON STANDARDS. EU High Representative Javier Solana has stated that he is displeased with the slowdown of the standards process as well as decentralization in Kosovo. He called for more projects to facilitate the return of ethnic Serbs to their homes. In a separate statement, UNMIK chief Soren Jessen-Petersen noted that Serbia was partially to blame for the slowdown because Belgrade authorities had not allowed Kosovo Serbs to participate in the political process.

ALBANIAN ELECTION CONTROVERSY. The Albanian Central Election Commission agreed on July 19th to repeat parliamentary elections held on July 3rd in one district within the country. With election results inconclusive, former Albanian President Sali Berisha appears to have won. Berisha served as the country's president from 1993 to 1997, leading Albania into chaos as an investment scheme caused many Albanians to lose their savings. Berisha was forced from power and NATO-led forces were needed to help bring the country back to order. A former cardiologist, Berisha this time has vowed to help bring his country closer to European Union and NATO membership. He has also pledged to cut taxes in Albania by 50 percent, hoping to encourage investment in the country. The current governing Socialists, led by President Fatos Nano, have stated they will continue to protest the election results. Observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) described

the counting process in the election as contentious and disorganized. The organization also described how some party officials in some areas of the country put political interests first, choosing to take measures to assist their own candidates, instead of counting ballots accurately. The OSCE, Council of Europe, and European Parliament sent approximately 500 election monitors to oversee the election. Official results announced by the election commission show that Berisha won 73 of the country's 140 parliament seats, enough to form a new government if the results hold up under the challenge from the Socialists. Many observers regard the Socialist Party's efforts to force recounts as a tactic to delay their handover of power.

EU, MACEDONIA STUDY ACCESSION TALKS. The EU enlargement commissioner, Olli Rehn, declared last week in Skopje that the European Commission will announce November 9 whether the EU should begin accession talks with Macedonia. If the decision is approved by the EU's 25 member states, Macedonia will be granted EU candidate status and a framework for accession talks would be prepared. Rehn warned that the decision was not a forgone conclusion, and urged Macedonia to be more active in pursuing economic and legal reforms and tackling corruption.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER PUTS PRESSURE ON BELGRADE. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer urged Serbia & Montenegro to further steps in searching for and capturing wanted war criminals for transfer to The Hague. De Hoop Scheffer especially asked that the Serbian government take action to capture indicted war criminal Ratko Mladic, believed responsible for the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, in which 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were killed. The capture of Mladic is a prerequisite for Serbia & Montenegro to be invited to join NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), considered to be a precursor to eventual NATO membership. De Hoop Scheffer met with Serbia & Montenegro's President Svetozar Marovic in Belgrade. The country hopes to build ties with NATO and the European Union, seeking to eventually join both; however, Serbia & Montenegro's lack of cooperation with the war crimes tribunal at The Hague holds the country back from these aspirations. The NATO Secretary General also met with Serbia & Montenegro Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic and Serbian President Boris Tadic, with whom he also discussed the status of Kosovo.

SERBS SENTENCED FOR KILLING BOSNIAN MUSLIMS. A district court in Belgrade convicted four Serbs for their role in the abduction and execution of 16 Muslims from a bus in Bosnia in 1992. The four men were all members of the Avengers paramilitary group. Two of the men, Djordje Sevic and Dragutin Dragicevic, are already in custody and will serve 15 and 20 years, respectively. The

other two men are both on the run and were tried in absentia. They will both serve 20 years after they have been captured. The bodies of the victims were dumped into the Drina River, along the border between Bosnia and Serbia, never to be found. Photographs taken by the culprits were used as evidence against them in the case. Relatives of the victims were not pleased with the sentences, noting that the men got half of the maximum sentences available. The chief of the three-judge panel that tried the men said she wanted to make sure that grisly crimes such as this would not occur again.

TOP SERBIAN MILITARY OFFICER ASSISTED MLADIC. A report from ex-Serbia intelligence official Goran Petrovic stated that Colonel Dragomir Krstovic, a former top officer and army chief-of-staff, served indicted war criminal Ratko Mladic as his security chief until the end of 2002. Serbian military officials are believed to have aided Mladic in evading capture. Krstovic is one of nine members of the Serbian military who Petrovic believed have offered Mladic illegal support in the past and may be continuing to offer support in running from the authorities.

KARADZIC SON RELEASED. The son of indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic was released by NATO forces after originally having been arrested for being a part of his father's illegal support network on July 7th.

QUOTABLE QUOTES:

"From the beginning, implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement was insufficiently aggressive. The most important failure was not capturing the two most wanted war criminals in Europe, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic... If Karadzic and Mladic are not brought to justice, the international security force... will never be able to leave, and Bosnia's return to a multiethnic society (and the institutions of Europe) will be delayed or prevented."—Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke (*Washington Post*, 7/19/05).

"I believe that we have indeed been learning the right lessons. We made the Balkans cause our cause. And despite the odds, NATO made a difference. If we compare the Balkans today to where that region was a decade ago, it becomes clear just how much progress has been made."—NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer (*NATO*, 7/18/05).

"Everyone in Kosovo must know that complying with the standards is linked very closely with the status question."—German opposition chancellor candidate Angela Merkel, commenting while on a visit to Kosovo (*AP*, 7/15/05).

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