



BALKAN WATCH

Monday, April 10, 2006

Volume 8.8

A Review of Current Events

VOINOVICH WARNS ABOUT KOSOVO INDEPENDENCE.

Republican Senator George Voinovich warned other officials that Kosovo is moving too quickly toward independence and could potentially return to violence. Voinovich urged international parties involved in the current Kosovo political status talks in Vienna to note that implementing an agreement between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians may take time and still require an international military presence to prevent violence from recurring. Voinovich said that the situation could necessitate a rise in American troop levels, which Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had stated recently would decline from its current level of 1,900. Voinovich recently returned from a trip to the region, in which he met with Kosovo's President Fatmir Sejdiu and Prime Minister Agim Ceku, whose election to office has been controversial for many Serbs and who have derided him as a former war criminal. Many Kosovo Albanians have called for an independent Kosovo by July, which Voinovich warned as being too soon. Fears of ethnic violence between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo have also increased in recent weeks after the stabbing of a Kosovo Serb youth; UN police spokesperson Kai Vittrup, however, described it as an isolated incident. Voinovich also noted his concerns that the judicial system in Kosovo is too weak to maintain order.

ROHAN RULES OUT PARTITION.

Albert Rohan, Austrian diplomat and deputy to the UN special envoy for Kosovo, told Kosovo Serbs at a meeting of the parties in the Vienna final status talks that the possibility of partitioning Kosovo between Albanians and Serbs would be opposed and prevented by members of the international community. Rohan recently presented leaders with a plan on local government reform, designed to help ease ethnic tensions. His team was concerned with Serbs possibly uprooting themselves from Kosovo and leaving for Serbia. His local government reform plan was also designed to allow Serbs to have a greater voice and more political participation in Kosovo affairs. Rohan's draft local government reform proposal incorporated compromises made during the first two sessions of the talks. The proposal incorporated components of a Council of Europe charter for local government, which devolves large powers down to local levels. He noted that upcoming negotiations would focus on other local government controversies, such as the status of Serb Orthodox churches and the division of assets and liabilities between Serbia and Kosovo. Rohan was confident that a local government agreement would be reached in April, allowing the talks to continue toward their goal of clarifying the final status of Kosovo. Rohan, however, has also come under controversy for his actions during the negotiations. The Serb delegation criticized him for unfairly meeting with Kosovo Albanian mayors while on a three-day-long trip to

Pristina. Leon Kojen, an advisor to Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica and a member of the Serbian delegation in Vienna, claimed that Rohan unfairly "presented a document" to Kosovo Albanian officials in Pristina without traveling to Belgrade to share it with Serbian officials there.

UNMIK CHIEF CRITICIZES BELGRADE.

UNMIK chief Soren Jessen-Petersen recently criticized Belgrade for encouraging Kosovo Serbs to avoid participation in the political process in Kosovo. Jessen-Petersen noted that Serbian government officials in Belgrade urged Kosovo Serbs to neither vote nor run for office, despite the fact that salaries would be set aside for them in the total budget, held between the two ethnic groups in Kosovo. Many Kosovo Serb government officials have refused to receive their salaries from the government of Kosovo, opting instead to receive them from Belgrade, which continues to fund them. Jessen-Petersen noted that this policy, as well as the continued departure of many Kosovo Serbs from Kosovo, undermines the necessary reconciliation process that must take place between Serbs and Albanians in order to achieve peace in Kosovo and in the Balkans as a whole. Jessen-Petersen met informally with various international officials, including members of the Kosovo Contact Group and diplomats from ten southeastern European countries, at a seaside resort near Athens.

CRVENKOVSKI AIMS TO END BORDER DISPUTE.

Macedonian President Branko Crvenkovski has recently stepped up efforts to resolve the partially non-delineated border between his country and Kosovo. The border dispute is complicated by Kosovo's undefined political status, which requires Crvenkovski to discuss the problem with Serbia and Montenegro. Crvenkovski traveled to Belgrade, where he met with President Svetozar Marovic to discuss the problem. He has urged that the border dispute be resolved before the conclusion of the final status talks over Kosovo taking place in Vienna. The border dispute is a result of the 1998-99 turmoil in Kosovo. When international efforts led Serbia to withdraw from Kosovo, an area of approximately 5,000 acres along the Macedonian-Kosovo border was left open, no longer under the control of Serbian officials. Macedonia's Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski recently stated he would discuss the border question with Kosovo Prime Minister Agim Ceku. Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica recently remarked that since Kosovo is still part of Serbia and Montenegro, resolution of the border question must involve his government, which has refused to accept the possibility of an independent Kosovo.

MAROVIC OFFERS TO MEDIATE. Serbia and Montenegro's President Svetozar Marovic has offered to mediate between Serbs and Montenegrins following a referendum scheduled for May 21 in which Montenegrins

will go to the polls to decide whether their republic should become an independent country. Marovic is, himself, from Montenegro, and his role could be helpful in sorting through potential confusion following the vote. Marovic noted that he may need to mediate between Serbs and Montenegrins regardless of the outcome.

MLADIC DEADLINE EXTENDED. The EU extended a deadline set for the Serbian government to capture wanted war criminal General Ratko Mladic and turn him over to the UN war crimes tribunal at The Hague to the end of April. UN chief prosecutor Carla Del Ponte reportedly noted that Serbian cooperation with the tribunal has improved slightly over recent weeks, allowing the EU to extend the deadline. Serbian government officials are hoping to begin talks with the EU to put their country on track toward joining the organization. EU Western Balkans coordinator Reinhard Priebe met with officials from both Serbia and Montenegro, after receiving word via EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn that Serbia's cooperation with the tribunal had improved and that Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica had vowed to find, capture and transfer Mladic.

QUOTABLE QUOTES:

"When the mayors told me that they couldn't live in independence if this were the outcome of the status process, I told them this is your decision. We cannot force you to stay, we cannot force anybody to return. What we can do is to provide conditions, where objectively we can expect the Serbs to stay here and to come back."—Austrian diplomat Albert Rohan, deputy to UN Kosovo special envoy Martti Ahtisaari (*AP*, 3/30/06).

"Building confidence and reassuring minorities is the responsibility of all Kosovo Albanians, but in order to be fully effective it also requires a constructive engagement by Belgrade."—UNMIK chief Soren Jessen-Petersen, commenting on Belgrade's discouragement of Serb participation in the Kosovo political process (*AP*, 4/5/06).

"We are trying to transform the Balkans once known as the powder keg of Europe into a European neighborhood. We must all contribute to the stabilization of the region, and that includes determining the final status of Kosovo."—Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Yiannis Valinakis (*AP*, 4/5/06).

Prepared by John Sannar