



BALKAN WATCH

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A Review of Current Events

SEJDIU ELECTED PRESIDENT OF KOSOVO. Following the death of Kosovo President Ibrahim Rugova, Kosovo's parliament elected law professor Fatmir Sejdiu as the next president of Kosovo. Sejdiu was the only candidate for the post, nominated by his Democratic League of Kosovo after a two-week mourning period for Rugova. Sejdiu won the election by a vote of 80 to 12. He has previously served as the party's secretary-general and as a member of parliament. Upon his election, Sejdiu noted that he supported an independent Kosovo, along the lines of his predecessor, promising to work closely with the United States and the EU to ensure that independence is achieved. He also stated in his acceptance speech the importance of protecting minority rights and ensuring that Kosovo is at peace with its neighbors. Many observers view Sejdiu as a political moderate within his party. His election, however, did not come without controversy. The parliament advanced the date of the election after criticism from UNMIK chief Soren Jessen-Petersen and some political leaders in Kosovo regarding parliament's presidency unnecessarily delaying the vote. As the new president, Sejdiu will play a role in Kosovo's upcoming final status talks to be held in Vienna beginning later this month.

MONTENEGRO PARLIAMENT DELAYS SETTING REFERENDUM DATE.

Montenegrin President Filip Vujanovic delayed a key parliamentary vote set to decide when Montenegro will hold a referendum to decide whether the republic should remain a member of the state union with Serbia or if it should become independent. Vujanovic delayed the parliamentary vote after Slovak diplomat and EU envoy Miroslav Lajcak recommended that it be rescheduled. Previously, the parliament was set to vote on February 7 to hold the referendum in mid-April. Lajcak has been facilitating discussions between the pro-independence camp and those who wish that Montenegro remain tied to Serbia. Thus far, he has been able to get the parties to agree on how to finance the vote and that international monitors should observe the vote to safeguard its integrity. The most contentious problem, however, has been to decide how many people need to vote in the referendum for it to be considered valid. Groups against Montenegrin independence have requested there be a requirement that at least fifty percent of eligible Montenegrin voters participate in the referendum in order for its results to be valid. Pro-independence groups, however, have opposed such a requirement, which may make it more difficult for them to succeed in the vote, given low turnout at previous elections. Recent polls have shown approximately 41 percent of eligible voters to be in favor of independence, with 32 percent opposed. The remaining quarter of the eligible voting population, however, has been undecided. On account of this controversy, Vujanovic has recommended that the EU consider referendum rules applied to other

European countries. Some European officials have also appeared sympathetic to a suggestion by Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica that a "supermajority" of 55 percent of those voting, rather than 50 percent plus one, be accepted as the standard for a successful independence vote.

DEL PONTE WARNS BELGRADE OVER MLADIC.

While visiting Belgrade, chief UN war crimes prosecutor Carla Del Ponte warned the Serbian government that she needs to see "concrete results" showing that the government is actively seeking to apprehend indicted war criminal Ratko Mladic to turn over to the Hague tribunal. She noted that she had received guarantees from government members that they were actively seeking out Mladic; however, she remarked that guarantees to implement stronger search measures were not enough and that she needed proof these measures have actually been implemented. Del Ponte met with Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica, Defense Minister Zoran Stankovic, and Human Rights Minister Rasim Ljajic, who also heads the country's UN cooperation council. Del Ponte reportedly was interested in applying a model of cooperation to the searches for Mladic and his colleague Radovan Karadzic that led to the successful capture of Croatian war criminal Ante Gotovina in the Spanish Canaries in December. Various international officials, including Del Ponte, have publicly expressed their belief that elements of the Serbian military have kept Mladic in hiding. Del Ponte has asked that the EU delay beginning cooperation talks between Serbia and the EU until Mladic and possibly Radovan Karadzic, who is believed to be in hiding in the Bosnian Serb Republic, are captured. Serbia and Montenegro's Supreme Defense Council recently admitted that army officers did indeed assist Mladic in hiding until June 2002. Del Ponte also called for the EU and NATO to assist Bosnia in searching for Karadzic.

MILOSEVIC TRIAL BEGINS FIFTH YEAR.

The trial of former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic has begun its fifth year at The Hague. Milosevic is being tried for sixty charges related to war crimes and crimes against humanity in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo during his tenure as president. He is also being tried for separate genocide charges related to the 1995 massacre at Srebrenica, in which 8,000 Muslim men and boys were murdered. If he is convicted, he will spend the rest of his life in prison. The court, thus far, has heard nearly 350 witnesses. The trial, however, has been criticized because of its length and frequent delays, usually resulting from claims of ill health or other objections raised by his defense team. Members of the prosecution have noted that the actual length of the trial is only expected to total around 1,000 hours. The court only meets for three half days per week but has set mid-March as a goal for Milosevic's defense team to wrap up their presentation. Milosevic's

health continues to be a factor in the trial's progress. Before Christmas, his defense team asked that he be allowed to travel to Moscow to receive treatment from a cardiology clinic because of his high blood pressure problem. The court has yet to rule on whether he will be allowed to leave.

DANISH EMBASSY IN SARAJEVO EVACUATED.

An international uproar over the publication of several controversial cartoons depicting the Islamic Prophet Mohammed included a number of protests in countries in the Balkans. Mustafa Cerić, a religious leader of the Bosnian Muslim community, remarked that the international uproar over the cartoons showed that it was time for an international inter-religious dialogue, offering Sarajevo as a potential venue while also calling upon Muslims to use the opportunity to open such talks. Cerić also urged that planned protests in front of the Danish Embassy in Sarajevo be called off, believing that dialogue, not protests, were the best way to air concerns. Danish officials were briefly evacuated from the embassy after an anonymous bomb threat.

QUOTABLE QUOTES:

"The support for Ratko Mladic has occurred even though the authorities in Serbia and Montenegro were well-aware of their international obligations to apprehend and transfer fugitive indictees to the I.C.T.Y. It detracts from Serbia and Montenegro's aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration. We are disappointed that despite many statements of intent from the government of Serbia and Montenegro, progress has not been made on the apprehension of Mladic."—State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack, criticizing Belgrade's unwillingness to apprehend indicted war criminal Ratko Mladic to turn him over to the tribunal at The Hague (*Voice of America News*, 2/4/06).

"We need common principles to find a fair solution to these problems for the benefit of all people living in conflict-stricken territories.... If people believe that Kosovo can be granted full independence, why then should we deny it to Abkhazia and South Ossetia? I am not speaking about how Russia will act."—Russian President Vladimir Putin, discussing how the process used to resolve the final political status of Kosovo could be applied to other conflicts (*Press Conference*, 1/31/06).

"Kosovo's independence is non-negotiable. For us it is very important that this road to independence is a quick one."—Newly-elected Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu, commenting on his position in favor of an independent Kosovo (*AP*, 2/10/06).

Prepared by John Sannar