



# BALKAN WATCH

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## A Review of Current Events

**RUGOVA DIES, KOSOVARS MOURN, STATUS TALKS IMPACT UNCERTAIN.** Kosovo President Ibrahim Rugova died of lung cancer on January 21 at the age of 61. The UN envoy for Kosovo final status talks, Martti Ahtisaari, announced that a preliminary meeting scheduled for January 25 in Vienna would be postponed until February. In the interim, parliament speaker Nexhat Daci will take Rugova's place at the talks. Rugova was long an advocate for an independent Kosovo, discouraging the use of violence to attain independence. This led many to nickname him "Kosovo's Gandhi." Daci also described Rugova as the most influential person in Kosovo's recent history. UNMIK chief Soren Jessen-Petersen urged unity among the Kosovars after Rugova's death. Serbian President Boris Tadic expressed hope that Rugova's death would not hinder attempts to bring peace to the Balkans and not diminish EU accession efforts undertaken by many people in the region. President Tadic asked to attend Rugova's funeral in Pristina, to honor the leader of the Kosovo Albanians. Tadic, however, continued to reiterate his position that Kosovo was a part of Serbia, angering many Albanians and leading Rugova's family to request that Tadic not attend the funeral, noting that his presence would be inappropriate. Tadic continued to express his disappointment at not being able to attend the funeral, claiming that it could have been an opportunity to begin a process between Serbs and Albanians in which members of each group would more readily accept each other.

Other international figures weighed in on Rugova's death, including UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. In Washington, Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns praised Rugova's work for not espousing violence and encouraged officials in Kosovo to continue their work to promote cooperation and peace. Secretary for Housing and Urban Development Alphonso Jackson was selected to represent the US at Rugova's funeral. Burns was scheduled to attend a meeting with other members of the Kosovo Contact Group—France, Great Britain, Russia, Germany, and Italy—in London.

Many Kosovo Serbs, however, remained skeptical about their future in Kosovo after Rugova's death. Sandra Raskovic-Ivic, Serbian government representative in Kosovo, warned that other Kosovo Albanian leaders did not entirely share Rugova's commitment to peace and non-violence. Rugova's political party, the Democratic League of Kosovo, is reportedly suffering from divisions that Rugova's death might exacerbate.

**MONTENEGRO TRAIN CRASH KILLS 43.** A train carrying approximately 250 passengers derailed outside of the town of Bioce, nine miles northeast of Podgorica, killing

48 and leaving 198 injured. The wreck was initially believed to be the fault of the train's driver. Many experts have described the accident as Europe's worst train wreck since the 1998 derailment of an express train traveling between Munich and Hamburg in which 96 people were killed. Reports also stated that group of school children returning from a ski trip was on board and that the majority of the injured were children. Montenegrin Transportation Minister Andrija Lompar and railways chief Ranko Medenica both resigned after the crash. Ilija Lubarda of Montenegro Railways noted that the train was in perfect condition before departure, believing that human error was to account for the crash. Lubarda, along with Montenegro Railways, is heading a team investigating the accident. Preliminary reports stated that the driver may have left his seat to make a minor repair elsewhere on the train and failed to lock the brakes. Judge Zoran Radovic, investigating the wreck, ordered that the driver be detained for one month. Montenegrin President Filip Vujanovic urged people in Montenegro to aid victims and families harmed in the crash. Serbia & Montenegro President Svetozar Marovic described the accident as a "great tragedy" and also declared a three-day mourning period for those lost.

**LAJCAK URGES MONTENEGRO-SERBIA COMPROMISE.** EU envoy Miroslav Lajcak has urged parties involved with the upcoming independence referendum in Montenegro to reach compromise over the rules that will govern the voting, which may lead to the dissolution of the current state union between Montenegro and Serbia. Members of the pro-independence camp, led by Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic and President Filip Vujanovic, support the view that the republic should become independent as long as a majority of people voting in the referendum vote in favor of independence. Members of the opposition, however, have stated they will only support independence as long as fifty percent of eligible voters in Montenegro vote for it. Lajcak, a Slovak, was sent by the EU to help bring the two sides to a compromise on the terms of reference for the referendum. The Montenegrin parliament is scheduled to convene on February 7 to set an official date for the referendum. Recent opinion polls have shown that approximately 41 percent of registered Montenegrin voters are in favor of independence, while 32 percent are opposed and 25 percent remain undecided. Failure to agree on terms for holding the referendum may lead to a portion of the population staying home and not voting.

**BELGRADE TO OPEN ARCHIVES FOR UN PROSECUTORS.** Members of the Serbia and Montenegro government announced that they will open government archives to prosecutors working for the UN war crimes tribunal at The Hague. Serbia and Montenegro

Human Rights Minister Rasim Ljajic noted that the archives include an entire file on indicted war criminal Ratko Mladic. Ljajic also noted he hoped his government's compromise offer would help it in its goal of attaining EU membership.

**BOSNIAN SERB PARLIAMENT VOTES NO CONFIDENCE.** Members of the Bosnian Serb parliament have voted no confidence in their government, ousting Prime Minister Pero Bukejlovic and his cabinet from office. Bukejlovic and his nationalist Serbian Democratic Party supporters had been unable to reach agreement with the opposition to pass a 2006 budget and various other legislative items. Bosnian Serb President Dragan Cavic announced that he would appoint a new prime minister within the constitutionally required ten day period.

**BOSNIA-EU OFFICIALS AGREE ON PRELIMINARIES FOR ACCESSION TALKS.** Bosnian officials have agreed on a format for talks to begin a preliminary association agreement with the EU. Bosnian and EU officials believe such talks could be completed by the end of the year.

## QUOTABLE QUOTES:

"[The late President Ibrahim Rugova] was really the defining figure in Kosovo politics, the one person who was able to preserve unity among the various groups and factions in Kosovo. This is someone who is going to be very sorely missed... What we hope now is that in the wake of his tragic death, the Kosovars are going to reassert and commit themselves to unity among themselves, that they will form one united negotiating team for the negotiations that will proceed after the funerals. [I hope that the Kosovo negotiators] will reject those who would say that further violence is the way forward and that they will obviously reach out to the Serb people in Kosovo on the issue of minority rights."—Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns (*AFP*, 1/25/06).

"I'm certain that President Rugova would have liked to see that we will proceed with status negotiations so that results can be achieved. I also express the hope that the situation will remain calm and that the constitution will be honored."—Martti Ahtisaari, UN mediator for Kosovo final status talks (*AFP*, 1/21/06).

"My biggest disappointment on leaving Bosnia ... is the fact that Karadzic and Mladic are not in The Hague."—High Representative Paddy Ashdown, commenting upon the failure of the Serbs to turn over the two most important war criminals, upon relinquishing his position (*AFP*, 1/24/06).

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