



# BALKAN WATCH

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## A Review of Current Events

**MONTENEGRIN SERBS AGREE TO REFERENDUM TALKS.** Members of the pro-Serbian opposition in Montenegro agreed to participate in European Union-mediated talks to hammer out the rules and other details of a referendum tentatively scheduled for April to determine whether Montenegro will become independent from its union with Serbia. Opposition leader Predrag Bulatovic, however, has refused to hold a direct dialogue with Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic. The EU has already appointed Slovak diplomat Miroslav Lajcak as its mediator in the Montenegrin conflict. The talks will be important to enhancing the legitimacy of the planned independence referendum. Lajcak has advocated dialogue between the parties. The two sides will also need to determine how many people will need to vote in the referendum for its results to be valid. Montenegro would be in accordance with international law and European practice if it stipulated that 50 percent plus one of those voting supported independence. Momcilo Vuksanovic of the pro-Serb Council of National Assemblies suggested that Lajcak's appointment symbolizes that the EU has already presupposed that a separation is inevitable between Serbia and Montenegro. Lajcak's own country, Slovakia, separated from the Czech Republic peacefully in 1993 in what has become known as the Velvet Divorce.

**RUGOVA HEALTH QUESTIONED.** Kosovo President Ibrahim Rugova recently made a rare public appearance to attend meetings and reassure people about the state of his health. The president had been diagnosed with lung cancer in September and has been undergoing treatment including chemotherapy since then. After his public appearance, he also met with doctors at Camp Bondsteel in eastern Kosovo to discuss his health. Rugova, however, had to cancel a meeting with Italian Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini, who came to Belgrade and Pristina to meet with officials before upcoming final status talks. An unidentified Italian spokesperson told reporters that Rugova was being treated for his illness in a small emergency clinic set up in his home. Fini remarked that Rugova's condition was "stable." Discussing the final status talks, Fini noted that the issue has not yet been decided and officials in Pristina need to demonstrate they are able to continue to achieve progress on implementation of international standards criteria, including those regarding minority rights.

**SERBIAN MOBILE COMPANY LOSES LICENSE OVER KOSOVO.** Serbian mobile phone company Mobtel lost its license from the Serbian government because of an apparently secret deal between the company's controversial Serbian leader Bogoljub Karic and the Kosovo Albanian mobile company Mobikos. Serbian Economy Minister Predrag Bubalo claimed that the deal, which would have allowed Kosovo Albanian phones to operate on the same

network as Serbian phones, would have "jeopardized national security." Mobikos is operated by Kosovo Albanian businessman Ekrem Luka, an advocate of an independent Kosovo. The Mobtel company, however, is locked in controversy extending beyond the conflict in Kosovo. In 2005, Karic sold his shares in the company to an Austrian business conglomerate, which has also been hampered by uncertainties over who has majority ownership of the company. Karic had originally founded Mobtel with the Serbian-government-run PTT phone company. An international court in Switzerland will determine who owns the company, possibly impacting the decision to sell network rights in Kosovo.

**MLADIC PENSION RECENTLY STOPPED.** Serbian authorities recently publicized the fact that indicted war criminal Ratko Mladic had been receiving pension money from the Serbian government until it was allegedly stopped in November. Authorities noted that the money was picked up by members of Mladic's family or two officers in the Serbia & Montenegro army, whom he had authorized to collect the money on his behalf, after Serbian authorities directly deposited the money into an account with Mladic's name on it. Defense Minister Zoran Stankovic stated that the money transfers were stopped after Mladic failed to renew authorization paperwork allowing his family or the officers to collect the money for him. The pension discovery came as UN war crimes prosecutor Carla Del Ponte stepped up pressure on the Serbian government to apprehend Mladic and Radovan Karadzic. Del Ponte described the Serbia & Montenegro army as the primary obstacle to Mladic's capture. In response, the Supreme Defense Council of Serbia & Montenegro called for charges to be filed against any soldier seen aiding Mladic or any other indicted war criminal. Additionally, the Serbian government was expected to form a new National Security Council with the expectation that it would capture more of the country's indicted war criminals for transfer to The Hague. Officials have also stated that they have never been closer to capturing Mladic as they are now. Some of Mladic's aides have reportedly been captured recently after Serbian authorities tapped a cell phone conversation between them and Mladic. Serbian President Boris Tadic, however, has been cautious about speculating on the likelihood of success in the capture of Mladic. Tadic stated that he does not believe they are close to "solving the Mladic problem." Observers have noted that Mladic's capture has been frequently predicted by sources in Belgrade, yet he remains at large more than five years after the overthrow of the Milosevic regime.

**SREBRENICA KILLER CONVICTED.** Serbian paramilitary member Slobodan Davidovic, 52, was recently convicted for killing Bosnian Muslim men and boys as part of

the Srebrenica massacre of 1995. Davidovic's video-recorded crimes had been broadcast by Serbian television last year, stunning Serb viewers who had been in denial that the massacre had occurred. Davidovic was also convicted for torturing a Croat prisoner of war during the 1991 war between Serbia and Croatia. He had been captured in June 2005 in eastern Croatia and tried in a court in Zagreb. Five accomplices have all been captured since June in Serbia and are on trial there. Zagreb district court judge Miroslav Sovani stated in his ruling that Davidovic returned to his home in eastern Croatia after the Srebrenica massacre as if nothing had happened. The court sentenced him to fifteen years in prison.

**BOSNIA TO INTRODUCE VAT.** Bosnia will reform its sales tax policies this month and introducing a value-added-tax (VAT) of 17 percent on products sold in stores. Prime Minister Adnan Terzic commented that the country made the necessary preparations to implement the new tax, seen as a way to increase Bosnian living standards and bring it closer to EU integration.

## QUOTABLE QUOTES:

"We are at the end of one momentous year for Kosovo and the beginning of another. The past twelve months, like every year, have had their ups and their downs—their triumphs and their tragedies. But they have ended on a high—with the opening of the process to determine the status of Kosovo. The coming year will more likely see the end of that process."—UNMIK chief Soren Jessen-Petersen's New Year message to the people of Kosovo (*UNMIK, 12/30/05*).

"We have to raise the trust among all Kosovo citizens in the process of the formation of the Kosovo state. The forming of the state of Kosovo is a process that involves each and every one of Kosovo's citizens and because of this we have started several inner dialogues with all of society's structures and communities."—Kosovo Prime Minister Bajram Kosumi, discussing efforts to integrate minorities within the government of Kosovo (*BBC News, 12/24/05*).

"I believe we will have a dialogue with the inclusion of all political parties—both the ruling coalition and the opposition—in order to reach what the international community and EU are expecting of us, and that is a legitimate process which will help improve stability in Montenegro."—Slovak diplomat and EU mediator Miroslav Lajcak, on upcoming pre-referendum talks in Montenegro (*Mina News Agency, 12/21/05*).

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