** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Wednesday, 19 February 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**Vulin: No response from EULEX on lists for arresting Serbs (*Novosti*)**

Outgoing Serbian Minister in charge of Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar **Vulin** has stated that EULEX had not given an official response whether there are lists for arresting Kosovo Serbs, which are mentioned in the Albanian press. “We requested official information from EULEX and we still don’t have an answer whether such lists exist. In any case, those who are doing this are doing with the intention to intimidate and confuse the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija,” said Vulin. He said he was in daily contact with Oliver Ivanovic’s family and his lawyers, pointing out that he is in difficult health condition. “We can’t understand the latest decision where he is not permitted to be transferred from one prison to another,” said Vulin. He once again called Kosovska Mitrovica residents to go to the polls on Sunday in large numbers.

**RIK designates 8,262 polling stations without Kosovo and Metohija (*Tanjug*)**

The Republican Election Commission (RIK) has designated 8,262 polling stations for the upcoming parliamentary elections, slated for 16 March, in the territory of Vojvodina, Serbia proper, including those in penal institutions. Polling stations in Kosovo and Metohija and the ones abroad have not been included in this number. RIK President Dejan **Djurdjevic** said that the deadline for determining polling stations is 23 February, and that Serbia will this time have one polling station less than it was the case in May 2012. The RIK noted that the polls will be monitored by the limited election observation mission of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE. The RIK accredited eight OSCE representatives to observe the parliamentary elections.

**Additional 130 Austrian troops for Kosovo (*Beta*)**

The Austrian Government decided to increase the number of troops in international missions, including KFOR for which it envisaged additional 130 soldiers. As Defense Minister Gerald **Klug** stated after the session, additional soldiers will be sent to Kosovo in the first half of this year already. They will be primarily deployed in the north of Kosovo and replace the French contingent of KFOR. With additional troops, Austria will have 500 soldiers in KFOR. It has been decided to increase the number of soldiers in the EUFOR Althea mission in B&H by additional 100.

**SRS launches election campaign in Kosovska Mitrovica (*Tanjug*)**

The Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and movements Obraz and Nasi laucnhed their election campaign for the Serbian early parliamentary elections with a rally in northtern Kosovska Mitrovica. Nemanja **Sarovic**, SRS deputy president, underlined that this coalition is the only one that started its election campaign in Kosovo and Metohija. “Today everybody is turning their eyes from you, today when it is uncertain whether the parliamentary elections will be held here or not and how they will develop, we want to show that for the SRS, Obraz and Nasi there is nothing more important than Kosovo and Metohija,” Sarovic said. He underlined that Kosovo and Metohija cannot be separated from Serbia, and Serbia cannot exist without Kosovo and Metohija. “We can promise you that no matter what we will never betray you or give up,” Sarovic told people who were carrying the flags of Serbia, Russia and SRS party flags. Aside for Sarovic, the rally dubbed “Both Kosovo and Russia” was also addressed by Ivan **Ivanovic** of the Nasi movement and Mladen **Obradovic** of the Obraz movement and candidates for members of the Serbian parliament Zvonko **Mihajlovic** and Vladan **Tomovic**.

**Serbian Political Scene (*Radio Serbia*, by Djuro Malobabic)**

The election campaign has begun and most of the parties have already appointed their rivals on the criticism of whom they will form their campaign for the early parliamentary elections in Serbia, due on 16 March. So far ten political parties and coalitions have filed their tickets and another few are expected to do the same by 28 February, when the submission period expires.

As the elections are nearing, politicians are less and less picky about the means for the collection of political points. In just a few days, for instance, LDP (Liberal-Democratic Party) leader Cedomir **Jovanovic** criticized the outgoing Prime Minister – SPS (Socialist Party of Serbia) leader Ivica **Dacic**. The least expected criticism referred to the Brussels talks. The LDP leader claims that Dacic offered to **Thaqi** more than it was required. In their reply, the SPS denied that allegation and accused him of crossing, in a very short period, an interesting path from the position of a poor student leader to that of a tycoon-adventurer. The two biggest parties, the SNS (Serbian Progressive Party) and the DS (Democratic Party), have retained an old-fashioned form of mutual attacks and counterattacks by means of announcements. While the DS is accusing the SNS and their leader Aleksandar **Vucic** of dictatorship and the persecution of political opponents, repeating that any cooperation with the SNS is out of question, the SNS says that the DS is a party of criminals and tycoons and that they will never offer any cooperation to them.

The SNS leader, outgoing First Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic, states he will never flatter anyone during the campaign. He says he never deals with his rivals, but only with the tasks ahead of Serbia. Summing up the results in the last year and a half, Vucic said some progress that is not insignificant has been achieved, above all in EU integrations and that the leadership has tried to stop corruption and a chain of frauds, which battle is going to be very difficult in the forthcoming period.

Boris **Tadic**, the leader of the newly-formed New Democratic Party believes his party will be successful in the elections and says that their priority is battle against poverty and battle for jobs and investments.

The leader of the United Regions of Serbia party (URS) Mladjan **Dinkic** said that anyone’s victory in the elections would be in vain if there are still hungry people in the streets and unsatisfied citizens without jobs. He said that the SNS had showed that they had no knowledge about business.

If Serbia wants freedom, it has to be politically neutral, said the leader of the DSS (Democratic Party of Serbia) Vojislav **Kostunica**, stressing that his party has contributed most to the fact that Serbia is not a NATO member-state. He said his party also opposed EU accession and that Serbia should cooperate with the EU according to our own interests.

Despite being the second to hand in their ticket, the SPS coalition has not commenced a serious campaign yet as their leading politicians have not been appearing in public a lot or making statements. The reason for that may be the fact that their leader Ivica Dacic has been attending a new round of Brussels talks with Pristina or, as one of the most experienced politicians in the region, is just waiting for the right moment for the start of the campaign.

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**Lagumdzija: Fule finally clearly said we are not all the same (*Fena*)**

“I welcome the statement of the EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan **Fule** who has finally clearly stated that we are not all the same, that there those political leaders in B&H who had been investing honest efforts towards reaching an agreement on implementing the *Sejdic-Finci* ruling, those who had been saying they want agreement, but didn’t make any honest effort, as well as those who had been trying all the time to impose something else that isn’t the essence of the ruling,” said the SDP leader Zlatko **Lagumdzija**. “Having in mind the situation in the country, especially encouraging is Fule’s support to the initiative I have proposed to the EU representatives, whereby I requested that, despite the fact that a solution on implementing the *Sejdic-Finci* ruling cannot be reached, we need to accelerate talks and offer technical assistance regarding the implementation of Chapters 23 and 24 that refer to the rule of law, judiciary and battle against organized crime and corruption,” said Lagumdzija. Despite the failure in finding a solution for implementing the *Sejdic-Finci* ruling, the SDP leader says he welcomes Fule’s agreement with the presiding of the B&H Council of Ministers and entity prime ministers that precisely leads towards establishing efficient mechanisms for the rule of law and battle against corruption and organized crime.

**Most comprehensive interview by Valentin Inzko (*Srna*, by Nenad Tadic)**

The High Representative (HR) to B&H Valentin **Inzko** gave his most comprehensive interview since the beginning of his mandate to a Republika Srpska (RS) media outlet – he kept silent.  Namely, not even after several weeks of diplomatic talks between his office and the RS News Agency (Srna), and promises that the interview would be set up, Mr. Inzko did not find the time in his busy schedule to respond – not even by email – to questions from the press of the country in which he earns his (fat) salary. Some might say that this is quite normal for an institution extinguished long ago, though this has never been officially told. Some, perhaps malicious types, might notice that the HR had nothing to say about the riots in the city in which he himself lives. And truly, if one excuses the uncalled for observation that B&H might be sent EU troops, which was quickly denied by the European headquarters, the HR and the Office of the HR live in a state of blessed “daily obligations.”
***Srna*** asked the HR for an interview on “Use/Abuse of Symbols in B&H.”
Here are the questions:
1. Why is the OHR obstructing the erection of a cross on Zlatiste, in the RS territory? Especially when one considers that the other sides also use religious symbols to mark places where their people were killed, and yet the OHR does not react. (Sarajevo, for instance, is full of Muslim/Bosniak religious symbols.)
2. What is your position on the issue of inscriptions on memorials in Sarajevo which explicitly say, “Serb aggressors...,” “Serb Fascists,” or when “criminal” is used instead of “Serb”? Especially when one knows that the Dayton Accords qualify the B&H War as “a tragic conflict of the region.”
3. Why did you not intervene when “genocide” was inscribed on a memorial in Visegrad, at a location where no court had ruled that genocide occurred?
4. Will the OHR support the erection of a monument to killed Yugoslav army (JNA) soldiers in Dobrovoljacka Street, on Kazani, in Tuzla, and in other places in the B&H Federation where there are proofs that people were brutally killed?
5. How do you interpret the fact that not a single HR has ever attended a commemoration for Serb victims of the B&H War?
6. Since this year will mark the 100th anniversary of the assassination in Sarajevo and the beginning of WWI, what is your position: should Sarajevo restore Gavrilo Princip’s footprints where they have been for decades, or do you feel that their removal was the right thing to do?
Sometimes, even silence is an answer. In this case, the silence of Mr. Inzko indicates one of two possibilities. One, that the HR is politically biased and that questions such as these irritate him, and two, that he has himself become aware that his position is increasingly becoming the position of Valentin Inzko, and less and less that of the HR. A number of international community officials have for years been underestimating the press in the RS and the B&H Federation, especially the news agencies, and so have been conducting joint briefings at which they dictate whatever they want and then call them interviews. However, even the OHR knows full well that the issue of symbols is a much wider subject than monuments and insignia, and that it impacts on the perceptions of the people living in these parts. This is especially true in B&H where a symbolism is in itself life. However, the interview with Mr. Inzko was not a failure.
Namely, even the HR has become a symbol, a symbol of a spent protectorate.

**Galijasevic: Attempt to instrumentalize protests in the B&H Federation (*Nezavisne Novine*)**

Dzevad **Galijasevic**, an anti-terrorism expert, said that the statements of Wahhabi leaders in B&H, including Bilal **Bosnic**, are an attempt to instrumentalize the protests in the B&H Federation so that they can be accorded a religious dimension. “This is why all protests, even if they are motivated by social issues, represent a threat, since a robust and radical military movement, advocating war in these parts, could take part in them,” Galijasevic said. According to him, citing the right of a ruler to proclaim a jihad is a direct call to destroy the constitutional order of the country and a call to a religious war. “Bosnic and other Wahhabi leaders are telling Bosniaks that their motivation is pointless if it is not derived from Islam, and that every political system that is not based on religion is pointless,” Galijasevic explained. He said that the radical, religious face of Bosniaks has remained outside the public eye during the protests in the B&H Federation. “They feel that these protests should be given a religious momentum in order to further destabilize circumstances,” Galijasevic said. He claims that security agencies in B&H, as well as the judicial bodies, are inactive concerning this problem. “If the B&H Intelligence-Security Agency can keep quiet about something like this, then it is in fact a part of the problem. The Wahhabi movement is the most serious security threat of B&H, the region and the EU,” Galijasevic concluded. Husein Bilal Bosnic, a Wahhabi leader and a proponent of Wahhabism of Buzim, in his latest khutbah mentioned “judgment day,” saying that on that day “the sabers will cut well.”

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Kosovo Serb Claims Electoral Roll Contains Illegal Albanians (*BIRN*, 18 February 2014)**

As the campaign begins for a repeat vote for the post of mayor of Mitrovica, the Belgrade-backed citizens’ initiative Srpska said the electoral register had been illegally packed with Albanian voters.

Goran Rakic of Srpska has sent an open letter to the OSCE Mission to Kosovo, alleging that voters of Albanian nationality have illegally been put on the register for the mayoral vote in Mitrovica.

"The entry into the north Mitrovica electoral register of Albanians from south Mitrovica is a clear indication of a desire to make the north part of Kosovska Mitrovica look majority-Albanian," Rakic said.

Rakic urged the OSCE to work together with the EU law and order mission, EULEX, and investigate how the Albanians from south Mitrovica got on to the register, and to launch proceedings if need be.

He made the complaint a day after the electoral campaign for the north Mitrovica mayoralty, scheduled for February 23, got underway.

This will be a repeat vote, as Krstimir Pantic, also from "Srpska", elected mayor late last year, refused to sign his oath of office because it included Kosovo state insignia, albeit with paper glued on top, to hide it.

Besides Rakic, there are three more candidates at this time: Oliver Ivanovic, of the Social Democratic Party Civic Initiative, who is in police detention; Musa Miftari, of the Democratic League of Kosovo; and Florent Azemi, of the Democratic Party of Kosovo.

According to the Kosovo Central Electoral Commission, 28,429 voters are eligible to cast ballots in this election, 500 more than in the last polls in November.

**After slow start, Albania and Kosovo look to potential as partners (*Reuters*, by Benet Koleka and Fatos Bytyci, 17 February 2014)**

TIRANA/PRISTINA - Shortly after Kosovo declared independence from Serbia six years ago, neighbouring Albania said it would bequeath its Adriatic port of Shengjin to its landlocked ethnic kin.

The port, nestled on a scenic bay, is "the closest to Kosovo," about 125 km (77 miles) away, a poster in the office of Shengjin manager Gjovalin Tusha helpfully points out.

Albania's gesture meant much to majority-Albanian Kosovo as it sought to forge a path independent of Serbia and the Western aid and remittances that had propped it up since a 1998-99 war.

Tirana proposed that Pristina take over the running and enlargement of the port as, in effect, its own outlet to the sea. Little came of it and the trickle of Kosovo-bound goods through the shallow wharf has failed to match the lofty talk.

"In 2013, merchandise processing for Kosovo businesses was at a minimum, about 4,500 tonnes, or a ship and a half out of 126 to 130 ships," Tusha told Reuters in Shengjin.

Now a new drive is under way, spurred by a change of government in Albania and the recession in Europe, which has seen a damaging fall in the amount of money sent home by Albanian migrant workers - a mainstay of both economies.

At stake is Kosovo's economic viability and possibly its stability, with one of the youngest populations in Europe and a labour market woefully unable to support it.

In January, the two governments met in Prizren, an old trading town in Kosovo closely associated with ethnic solidarity as Albanian leaders once pledged there, in late Ottoman times, to protect Albanian lands from covetous Balkan neighbours.

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama hailed the "first page in a new chapter with Kosovo", listing energy security, farming, customs and tourism as areas of potential cooperation.

Kosovo and Albania "should live in a joint market," Behgjet Pacolli, Kosovo's deputy prime minister and a Swiss-made millionaire, told Reuters. But ties of blood and language have yet to be matched by legislation and initiatives, he conceded.

"People are trying to connect... But if you look at the law, at the paperwork, nothing has changed. This is just a wish-list," he said.

MEAGRE TRADE

The challenges are huge for the two small, impoverished countries that dream of eventual European Union membership.

For decades, Albania was cut off from ethnic kin elsewhere in the Balkans by its Stalinist ruler Enver Hoxha. Its borders flew open with the chaotic arrival of democracy in the early 1990s, but war in Yugoslavia again stymied cooperation.

Kosovo is one of seven states to emerge from ex-Yugoslavia. Each of those states now faces similar incentives to integrate economically and pool resources, though progress has been slow.

Despite the proximity, less than a third of Kosovo's sea-borne imports arrive via Albania. Most come through Montenegro's port of Bar and from Thessaloniki in Greece to the south.

Kosovo accounts for just 1 percent of Albanian imports and 8 percent of exports. Just 3 percent of Kosovo's imports come from Albania and 11 percent of its exports go the other way.

A costly new four-lane highway, dubbed "The Nation's Road", now links Tirana and Pristina, but there are none of the truck queues usually seen at other Balkan border crossings.

"This road is working at just 10 percent of its full capacity," said Pacolli, one of the most vocal advocates of greater integration. "Something has to change in our economic cooperation to make that road serve the country's economy."

Energy production may show a way forward.

After four years of procrastination by the previous Albanian government, the neighbours inked a deal in December to build a 400-kV transmission line linking their electricity grids.

The 75.4 million euro ($103 million) project, financed by a grant from Germany and a loan from the German KfW development bank, will allow the two countries to exchange electricity to maximise the use of Albania's hydro-generated power in winter and Kosovo's coal-fired electricity in drier weather.

Both suffer power shortages due to insufficient output, out-dated grids and theft. The new line should be completed in just over two years.

ENERGY, TOURISM, AGRICULTURE

Just an exchange of electricity at times of peak consumption "is immensely helpful in integrating both economies much more than we have seen so far," Jan-Peter Olters, the World Bank's representative in Kosovo, told Reuters.

The tourism industry is looking at marketing the two countries together, given easier access to the mountains of northern Albania via Kosovo.

However, trade rows over import duties on potatoes in 2009 and 2011 have highlighted how short-term business needs can sometimes trump long-term strategic cooperation.

When a Chinese delegation visited Shengjin last month, checking out locations to build a port worth some 2.2 billion euros, hackers traced to Kosovo attacked the port website, branding their kin in Albania "traitors".

"They (Albanians and Kosovars) need to look on each other as complementary, not as competitors or just collaborators," said Ardian Civici, a professor of economics in Albania.

"Right now, the economic cooperation of Albania and Kosovo should renounce political ... displays and break down the kind of barriers that today may seem unbreakable."

($1 = 0.7307 euros) (Editing by Matt Robinson and Gareth Jones)

**Serbia, BiH disagree on extradition protocol (*Southeast European Times*, by Bedrana Kaletovic, 18 February 2014)**

*An arrest warrant and extradition request have sparked a debate between Serbia and BiH on protocol*

Former commander of Bosnian Muslim forces in Srebrenica Naser Oric (centre) arrives at Sarajevo International Airport on July 4th, 2008, one day after he was cleared of war crimes against Serbs by The Hague's UN tribunal. [AFP]

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Serbia are sparing over extradition protocol after the Interpol National Central Bureau for Serbia issued an arrest warrant for former Bosnian Muslim commander Nasar Oric.

The Serbian Prosecutor's Office is investigating the murder of Serb civilians in the municipality of Srebrenica on July 12th, 1992, and said the suspects are Oric, Hakija Meholjic and three of their associates.

The five men are suspected of committing war crimes against the civilian population in Zalazje, Donji Potocari, which resulted in the deaths of nine Serb civilians.

Oric was sentenced to two years in prison in 2006 after he was convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for failing to prevent the deaths of five Bosnian Serb detainees and the mistreatment of 11 others between 1992 and 1993 in Srebrenica. An ICTY appeals court overturned his conviction and acquitted him of all charges in 2008.

"BiH, as a member country of Interpol, needs to act in accordance with Serbia's request. If this is not to happen, we are breaking international norms, and that which allowed BiH to become a member country. This pulls along possible suspensions and the loss of credibility in international relations," said Igor Radojcic, president of the Republika Srpska parliament.

But the Directorate for Co-ordination of Police Bodies of BiH said that Oric and the others would not be extradited.

"According to the law on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, [the suspects] are unable to face extradition to another country because they are citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina," the directorate said in a statement for SETimes.

Bakir Izetbegovic, the Bosniak member of BiH's tripartite presidency, said Serbia is constantly questioning suspects from BiH, even after they are found not guilty by The Hague tribunal.

He said that Oric was subject to a detailed investigation in The Hague, and that investigation is over.

"It is out of the question that he should be tried for the same crimes again in BiH, let alone in Serbia," Izetbegovic said last month after he met with Oric, who came to ask for protection from extradition to Serbia.

Belgrade informed the Interpol headquarters in Lyon, France, about the warrants on February 4th. The international police organisation will decide if the warrant will be changed from a diffusion to a red notice.

Diffusions are not binding. Any country that found Oric or Meholjic in its territory would decide for itself if they should be arrested and extradited to Serbia, the Directorate for Co-ordination of Police Bodies of BiH said. A red notice is binding for all the members of Interpol, and if found, the suspects must be extradited.

According to a protocol signed January 31st, 2013 between Serbia and BiH, the two states will co-operate to process war criminals, crimes against humanity and genocides.

The 2013 agreement was praised by the European Commission, which said it represents significant progress in regional co-operation to process war crime cases and it intensifies the relations of BiH, Serbia and Croatia in the field of co-operation in justice.

"The protocol is valuable because in war crime cases witness are in one country and the perpetrators in another, and material evidence even in a third. It is very, very difficult to get a final outcome. Agreements, like this protocol, help to delete borders," Bruno Vekaric, Serbia's deputy war crimes prosecutor told SETimes.

But former Serbia interior minister Bozidar Prelevic said that many protocols are not functional.

"It's a conflict of professions and politics. There are situations where politicians want to be the ones to decide things. On the other hand, when the prosecution has evidence that someone has done something, they have to initiate proceedings. So, in this case, you have a conflict of professions and politics," Preleviæ said.

Correspondent Ivana Jovanovic in Belgrade contributed to this report.

**Listen to your people, EU tells Bosnia leaders after unrest (*Reuters*, by Daria Sito-Sucic, 18 February 2014)**

SARAJEVO - The European Union told Bosnia's fractious leaders on Tuesday to heed protesters' demands for more accountability and transparency after the worst bout of civil unrest since the Balkan country's 1992-95 war.

The protests over unemployment, graft and political inertia toppled four of 10 regional governments in Bosnia's autonomous Federation, dominated by Muslim Bosniaks and Croats. Bosnia is made up of two parts, the Federation and Serb Republic.

Smaller, peaceful protests continue in what may become the most significant challenge yet to the peace deal that ended Bosnia's war but created an unwieldy system of ethnic power-sharing that has stifled all political and economic progress.

"I call on politicians ... not to ignore the voices of the citizens," EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule said after meeting Bosnian leaders and a delegation of the protesters.

"It is clear that the political system in Bosnia must become more responsive to the citizens' agenda - conditions for more jobs, more efficient justice and fair opportunities in life."

The protests began over factory closures in the former industrial hub of Tuzla and escalated when demonstrators set ablaze government buildings in the capital Sarajevo and other towns. Hundreds of people were injured, most of them policemen.

In several towns protesters set up citizens' assemblies to press their demands, which include a fairer governing system.

The current complex, multi-layered system of administration feeds large networks of political patronage, reserving jobs in governments and public companies for political party members.

During his visit, Fule also tried unsuccessfully to persuade Bosnia's rival Serb, Bosniak and Croat leaders to agree on a constitutional reform that would remove discrimination against minority groups such as Jews and Roma, who currently cannot run for top office in the country's ethnically-based governments.

The reform is a key condition for Bosnia to apply for EU membership, a goal shared by all its leaders. The reform has been blocked in the national parliament by conflicting interests of the three main ethnic groups.

**Macedonian Police Clash With Protesters Over Unpaid Bonuses (*BIRN*, by Sinisa Jakov Marusic, 18 February 2014)**

*Macedonian police on Tuesday detained some ex-workers in bankrupt state companies who were protesting in front of the government building*

A protest in Skopje by several hundred ex-workers in state firms that went bankrupt during the transition to a free market economy escalated after they received word that no one from the government was willing to talk to them.

In what had been a peaceful rally until then, the police grabbed several of the ex-workers and arrested their leader, Liljana Georgievska, after some of them tried to break through the police cordon.

Georgievska was let out of the police van shortly after a representative of the Macedonian Helsinki Committee intervened with the police.

“I say to the government: do not mess with our grey hair anymore because Bosnia and Ukraine will not be enough to describe what will happen to them,” Georgievska said before arrest.

In January, the government adopted a package of measures billed as improving the status of old workers in these defunct firms by granting them a monthly bonus of just over 100 euro.

Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski said that, along with other measures, it would solve the immediate problem faced by about 7,000 people.

However, the protesters said they had been duped and that the measure was only a publicity stunt ahead of the April presidential elections, which would only help a few people.

At the protest, Georgievska insisted that only about 350 workers from only three recently bankrupted state companies stood to benefit from the measure. "The bulk of some 6,000 older workers have been left on the streets,” Georgievska said.

Two anti-poverty groups in Macedonia, the Movement for Social Justice – Lenka, and the Leftist Movement – Solidarity supported the protest and said some of their members were also apprehended and later released by the police.

Skopje police spokesperson Liza Bendevska told NOVA.TV that the police made no arrests.

Photographs and video clips taken in front of the government HQ of several police officers manhandling the leader of the bankruptcy workers suggest otherwise.

Before heading towards the government, protesters first rallied before the building of the largest Association of Worker’s Unions, SSM, which they accused of teaming up with the government. The head of the SSM, Zivko Mitrevski, refused to meet them.

Like other Balkan countries, Macedonia is marred by high unemployment. The average wage is just over 300 euro a month and the unemployment rate is almost 30 per cent.

According to the State Statistical Office, which uses the definition of poverty accepted by Eurostat, one in three Macedonians lives in poverty - defined as being deprived of the essentials needed to maintain a minimum standard of living.

**Politicians and experts line up to ridicule Barroso over EU comments (*Newsnet Scotland*, 18 February 2014)**

Politicians and EU experts have joined in condemnation of EC President Jose Manuel Barroso after the official compared Scotland to Kosovo and claimed it would be all but impossible for the country to gain its EU membership in the event of a Yes vote.

Since giving an interview to the BBC, the former Portuguese politician has become a poster-boy for Scottish Unionists who have welcomed his attacks on the Scottish Government's EU membership plans.

However Mr Barroso has come under increasing pressure to withdraw his remarks which have been described as "innacurate" and "absurd", with suggestions that the EC President may have been "misled".

Speaking to the Daily Record, former Labour First Minister Henry McLeish accused Mr Barroso of having made a "monumental blunder" when he made his comments on the BBC on Sunday.

The EC President claimed that any attempt by a newly independent Scotland to negotiate a continuation of its EU membership following a Yes vote would be "very difficult, if not impossible". Mr Barroso also compared Scotland to Kosovo and suggested Spain would block any EU bid.

However within 24 hours of making the Kosovo claim, Mr Barroso began to backtrack saying it was not meant to be an exact comparison and that he was not trying to influence Scotland's independence debate.

Despite his clarification comments, the EC President has continued to face criticism for what many believe was a clumsy attempt to help those who oppose independence.

Speaking to the Daily Record, Henry McLeish said: "Manuel Barroso has made a monumental blunder in his remarks about Scotland and membership of the EU.

"He has either been misled into making such inaccurate comments or does not understand the context or the nature of the debate."

The former Labour First Minister added: "It is clear that if Scotland becomes independent then an application to join the EU will be straightforward.

"Membership of the EU will not present significant difficulties."

Following the intervention from the former Labour First Minister, Tory MEP for North West England, Sajjad H Karim, who is a Legal Affairs Spokesman for the Conservative Party in Europe, on the issue of Scotland in the EU also questioned Mr Barroso's claims, tweeting:

@SHKMEP: # scotland referendum borosso statement more bark than bite? Wld cmmsn not fall on Spanish to allow Scots in? No EU leadership No backbone.

@SHKMEP: rather deal with actualities. Cmmssn record is nt brilliant on such issues. Btw I hope scot vote to remain in.

Academics and experts lined up to ridicule the EC President:

 Ex-European Court judge Sir David Edward heaped more ridicule on Mr Barroso, branding his comments "absurd", saying: "There would be a legal obligation to negotiate the outcome to avoid the absurdity that just at the stroke of midnight everything comes to an end." He said.

 John Palmer, former political director of the European Policy Centre said of Mr Barroso's comments: "The idea that the Scottish people could be ejected or indefinitely suspended from the EU for opting for national independence is laughable"

 Writing on his blog, Aberdeen University's Professor Michael Keating said: "Barosso's comparison of Scotland with Kosovo is utterly misplaced. ... Comparing this [Kosovo] process with that of the Edinburgh Agreement, which was a model for democratic ways of dealing with the issue, is dangerous and a disservice to democracy itself. … Incidentally, Barroso has got himself tied in knots with his repeated argument that an independent Catalonia would be outside the EU."

 James Ker-Lindsay, Senior Research Fellow SE European Politics at London School of Economics, tweeted: "So, while an unprepared East Germany could join EU under special circumstances, a fully ready Scotland can't? Ridiculous! … Barroso stance on Scotland is both wrong and an affront to democratic principles! UK accepts referendum."

 On his blog, Neil Walker Regius Professor at Edinburgh University wrote: "Does he have a legitimate political voice in the debate? Does he speak from a position of legal authority? Or, regardless of his political or legal standing, does he simply have a good insider argument, and one that we should heed? The answer, on all three counts, would seem to be 'no'."

Tweeting tonight from Brussels, Scottish Environment Minister Richard Lochhead said: "Informal feedback from Member State delegations here in Brussels at Agri Council of Ministers: Barroso's indy comments were 'extraordinary'…"

Suggestions that Scotland would be denied EU membership were described as an "an absolute affront to democracy and to the founding principles of the EU", by Scotland's Deputy First minister Nicola Sturgeon.

Commenting, Central Scotland MSP Clare Adamson, who sits on the Scottish Parliament's European and External Relations Committee, said:

"As a growing number of experts have made clear, Mr Barroso's comments at the weekend were entirely misplaced. That former Labour First Minister Henry McLeish has also spoken out is welcome confirmation of this.

"As Mr Barroso himself said, the question of Scotland's membership of the EU as an independent state will not be a matter for the European Commission, but for the people of Scotland and other EU member states – none of whom have said they would veto Scotland's continuing membership, because it would be against their interests to do so.

"Scotland has been in the EU for the last 40 years, already complies with the terms of membership, and is committed to a positive relationship with the EU as an independent state. It is clear that the only threat to Scotland's membership of the EU would be a No vote and the increasingly Eurosceptic politics of Westminster - culminating in a possible in/out referendum in 2017."

Mr Barroso's suggestion that Spain would block Scotland's EU membership had already been undermined when two weeks ago, Spain's Foreign Minister confirmed that his country had no intention of interfering in Scotland's EU membership negotiations in the event of a Yes vote.

José-Manuel García-Margallo said: "If Scotland becomes independent in accordance with the legal and institutional procedures, it will ask for admission. If that process has indeed been legal, that request can be considered."

He added: "We don’t interfere in other countries' internal affairs. If Britain's constitutional order allows – and it seems that it does allow – Scotland to choose independence, we have nothing to say about this."

The episode has also led to renewed criticism of the BBC's coverage of referendum related issues and its role in providing such an uncritical platform for Mr Barroso.

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