** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Friday, 30 January 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**Nikolic: We will cooperate with Albanians, but we will never recognize independence of Kosovo (*RTS*)**

Serbian President Tomislav **Nikolic** talked with Cypriot Foreign Minister Ioannis **Kasoulides**, who expressed his support to Serbia’s EU integration and pointed that any additional conditions placed before Serbia would aggravate the situation and jeopardize stability in the Balkans. Nikolic underlined that the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is still unresolved, as well as the economic crisis that has deeply affected the country. “We will talk with Albanians, cooperate, build our friendship, but we will never recognize the independence of Kosov, just as you will never concede a part of your territory,” said Nikolic. Serbia greatly appreciates the support of Cyprus in the setting of the date for the beginning of EU entry negotiations and its principled stance not to recognize the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo, he emphasized. Kasoulides praised the honesty and vision of President Nikolic in tackling crucial challenges for the future of Serbia, and noted that the Cypriot EU path was as difficult as the Serbian. We are a small country that knows its rights and knows how to use them to defend our interests, said Kasoulides. When it comes to your country, which has a similar problem as we do, we also made an effort to prevent any new conditions from being placed before you, the Cypriot Foreign Minister said.

**Vulin: Ban is Pristina’s fear from presence of Serbian state (*Tanjug*)**

Outgoing Serbian Minister without Portfolio in charge of Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar **Vulin** opines that the ban for him to enter Kosovo and Metohija has nothing to do with the elections in northern Kosovska Mitrovica, but that it reflects Pristina’s fear from the Serbian state and its representatives. Vulin opines that Pristina fears the presence of the state of Serbia and its representatives. “There is especially fear from the fact that the Serbs have started o implement the Brussels agreement just as it has been agreed, and this doesn’t mean always to the benefit of Pristina,” said Vulin. “It is horrible that 90 percent of the graves have been desecrated, it is horrible that the so-called mayor of this town says that the Serbs can return now only if they are not involved in crime. Who is she to decide who can return and who is involved in crime,” said the Minister. He wondered what about the role of the international community that firmly promised with UNSCR 1244 that all displaced will be able to return.

**Djuric: Policy of retreat is the past (*B92*)**

The victory of Goran **Rakic** in Kosovska Mitrovica is an important day for Kosovo and Metohija, for the Serb community in this territory and for Serbia, the Serbian president’s advisor Marko **Djuric** told a ***B92*** radio broadcast. This official of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) says this is also the victory of the policy implemented by his party and expects the same result on 16 March when the voting will also take place in Kosovo and Metohija. “This victory will enable us to continue to achieve state and national goals,” said Djuric. He said that voting in Kosovo will be conducted with the support of the OSCE as it was done in the past and that there will be no changes compared to 2012. “There is a successful and elaborated mechanism, the way elections were held in 2012 and we expect everything to be fine,” said Djuric. He also said that the SNS expects to achieve the best possible result in Kosovo and Metohija as well and to be the first and largest party supported by Serbian citizens. “I am glad that the policy of retreat and signing of agreements that are not respected later on and that had discredited Serbia in the world were sent to the past,” said Djuric. He announced that after the victory of the candidate of the Serbian (Srpska) Civic Initiative and SNS member at the mayoral elections in Kosovska Mitrovica, they are heading towards the formation of the Union of Serb Municipalities. Speaking about the withdrawal of Krstimir **Pantic**, Djuric said this was a “personal act” and on the occasion of the fact that Oliver **Ivanovic** conducted the campaign literally from prison, he says that it is clear what the SNS thinks about his detention. “The question whether Rakic would win so easily if Ivanovic had been free is hypothetical. Rakic said his first task at the new post will be to work on Ivanovic and all Serbs to be released pending trial,” said Djuric. According to him, the Union of Serb Municipalities is the “pillar of our existence” and the wish of the state is for the Union to have strong institutions. “The Union will have full financial, logistic and any other support of the authorities in Belgrade. The strengthening of the position is Aleksandar **Vulin’s** day and night job and of the entire government. We used to have in the past a political class that accepted agreements that were not always in the country’s interest in exchange of support from abroad, but now things are different,” said Djuric.

**Simic: Pusic’s visit – last attempt at resolution without court (*RTS*)**

The arrival of Croatian Foreign Minister Vesna **Pusic** to Serbia represents the last attempt to resolve something without the court, or at least to reduce the gap between the two states that will be brought by the trial, Predrag **Simic**, professor at the Belgrade Faculty of Political Science told the morning news of ***Radio and Television of Serbia*** (RTS). He points out that both Belgrade and Zagreb know that there is no basis for the lawsuits. “It is clear to Croatian lawyers, starting from the first lawyer President Ivo **Josipovic** who wrote the lawsuit - they also don’t have any illusions, as well as Serbian lawyers who opine that a court settlement would be a better basis for relations between the two countries,” said Simic. Speaking about the election of Goran **Rakic** as the Mayor of North Mitrovica, Simic recalls that the candidate of the Serbian Civic Initiative had said that his task was to do everything for all those unjustly detained to be released, and the next the job was to form the Union of Serb Municipalities. “The next job is the formation of the Union and providing content to this Union, because Brussels only provides a framework review,” said Simic. He says there are differences between Belgrade and Pristina on how they view the Union, stressing that this body should ensure stable movement and rights of the Serbs. “In the north it is something close to an entity, and for Pristina it is something more than a NGO,” said Simic. A tough job awaits the new mayor – to fight for the content of the Union, from which depends the status of the Union. The parliamentary elections in Serbia, but also in Pristina, will influence the formation of the Union of Serb Municipalities, concluded Simic.

**Office for Kosovo and Metohija condemns KPS’ decision (*Politika*)**

The Office for Kosovo and Metohija condemned the decision of the Kosovo Police Service and Pristina institutions to ban around 120 Kosovo Serbs from visiting the graves of their loved ones on Saturday to mark the Orthodox All Souls' Day. According to the release, the movement of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija is being restricted for the umpteenth time in years and they are banned from visiting their homes and cemeteries. Once again, Serbs will not be allowed to pray in the Church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary in Djakovica and visit the four nuns as the only remaining Serb citizens in this city in south-west Kosovo and Metohija where 12,000 Serbs lived before the 1999 conflicts, just as they were prevented from doing so on Christmas Eve and Day, states the release. The Office called on the international community to react and create conditions for free and safe movement of Serbs and all Kosovo citizens. “Today, Serbs are the only nation in Europe which cannot visit their churches and the graves of their deceased. Until this has been brought to an end, there will be no conditions in Kosovo for co-existence and reconciliation which are the goals supported by the Serbian government,” states the release.

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**Dodik: Goal of protests in B&H – destabilization of RS (*Radio Belgrade*)**

The Republika Srspka (RS) President Milorad **Dodik** has told a ***Radio Belgrade*** broadcast that the leaders of the protests in the Federation B&H are the activists of the NGO sector from Sarajevo. “They were complaining the most but have regular salaries in the amount of more than three thousand KM, more than any official in the cantons. It is visible that this is a link of interests and intentions for destabilization aimed at ensuring political change of the system in B&H,” said Dodik. According to him, the power struggle is not a problem in itself, it is legitimate in all systems, but it is conducted only through an electoral process. “The RS needs only one legal and fair process. We expect elections in October, and this would be enough for anyone rational,” said Dodik. “Here they are not requesting a stable and even stronger and more legitimate RS, but destabilization of the RS… they are requesting streets to show that the RS doesn’t have institutions,” said Dodik.

**Kostunica: Instability in FB&H cannot be reason for amending Dayton (*Srna*)**

The leader of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) Vojislav **Kostunica** has stated in Andricgrad that the instability in the Federation B&H cannot be interpreted in any way as reason for amending the Dayton Accord, which preserves the two-entity structure of B&H while it exists. Kostunica told the press, following the meeting with the Republika Srpska (RS) President Milorad **Dodik** and director Emir **Kusturica**, that at a moment when a crisis has gripped the Federation, stability and peace are welcome in the RS. “Internal peace and consensus are needed in the RS and the Serb people on the other side of the Drina River are with heart and soul with the RS and they will support in any way what needs to preserve peace and stability in this corner inhabited by the Serb people,” said Kostunica. Stressing that the greatest state interest of Serbia is to take care of the RS and to preserve it, Kostunica added that there is not greater happiness and obligation for the Serb people than to preserve Serbia and the RS. The RS President Milorad Dodik said that the DSS leader Vojislav Kostunica was one of the first ones who supported the idea of the construction of Andricgrad. Dodik told the press that Kostunica’s attitude towards the RS has always been positive, strong and always without hesitation. “I am glad that we can now show that we weren’t wrong at the time when we were estimating our possibilities to do this in a short period of time,” said Dodik. Kusturica voiced satisfaction over the fact that Dodik and he have managed to complete, together with friends, almost 80 percent of Andricgrad. He pointed out that he shared wonderful experience with Kostunica from the time he was the Serbian prime minister. “At the time we formed Mokra Gora as the park of nature and defended it from the invasion of wild capitalism that was the main problem at that phase of Serbia’s development,” said Kusturica.

**Bosniaks want their flag in Montenegrin parliament (*Tanjug/Dan*)**

The Bosniak Party (BS) will file an intiative for amending the legal norm proposed by the Montenegrin Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, according to which the use of national symbols is banned, among other things in the premises of the state parliament, this party’s official Osman **Nurkovic** said. “We are a national party and authentic representatives of the Bosniak nation in Montenegro. We will request that we are enabled to place national symbols in the premises of the caucus in the Montenegrin parliament,” said Nurkovic.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Belgrade’s Candidate Wins North Kosovo Mayor Vote (*BIRN*, by Edona Peci, 24 February 2014)**

Goran Rakic was voted mayor of Serb-majority Mitrovica North, beating Oliver Ivanovic, who is in custody accused of war crimes, after an election race dogged by controversy and violence.

Rakic, the candidate from the Belgrade-backed ‘Srpska’ list, took 52.6 per cent of the vote in Sunday’s re-run polls to win the mayoralty, according to preliminary results published by the Kosovo Central Election Commission.

His rival Ivanovic, who was [detained last month on suspicion of involvement in war crimes against ethnic Albanians and murders committed after the late 1990s conflict](http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-serb-leader-in-custody-over-alleged-murder-case_blank), took 27.7 per cent.

“As new mayor my first request will be to free Mr Oliver Ivanovic and all other unjustly held Serbs,” Rakic said after the vote, according to media reports.

The turnout was low, with only 5,134 of over 28,000 eligible voters participating in the elections, a sign of continuing Serb discontent about taking part in polls organised by the Pristina authorities.

The electoral race in Mitrovica North was seen as crucial to improving relations between Pristina and Belgrade but was marred by violence and prolonged by political controversy.

Elections were first held on November 3, but had to be repeated two weeks later after three polling stations were attacked by masked men on election day.

The first re-run vote could not produce a new mayor, but after a run-off held on December 1, Srpska’s Krstimir Pantic was elected.

But in January, Pantic unexpectedly turned down the position, refusing to sign a document endorsing the oath of office to become mayor.

“By signing below a text where the coat of arms of Kosovo appears, suggesting that Kosovo is a republic, I would violate the constitution of Serbia,” he explained.

Another candidate for the mayoralty, Dimitrije Janicijevic, was also shot dead outside his apartment in January.

The outcome of the elections in Mitrovica North is important for the establishment of the Association of Serb Municipalities, a body envisaged by last April’s EU-brokered deal on normalising relations between Pristina and Belgrade.

**Hardline Serb wins Kosovo town mayoral race (*Al Jazeera*, 24 February 2014)**

Belgrade-backed Rakic becomes mayor of Mitrovica North in poll soured by killing of one candidate and arrest of another.

A hardline Kosovo Serb has become the mayor of Mitrovica North following a prolonged electoral race soured by the killing of one candidate and the arrest of another.

Goran Rakic, a Belgrade-backed candidate, won 52.6 percent of the ballots, according to official preliminary results.

NATO peacekeepers and EU police heightened security measures during Sunday's vote, the fourth such ballot in as many months. Previous attempts failed because of violence and intimidation.

Rakic's main contender, Oliver Ivanovic, is in detention after a European Union prosecutor indicted him for allegedly committing war crimes against ethnic Albanians in 1999 and alleged murder in 2000.

In January, Dimitrije Janicijevic, a candidate for mayor from a party that collaborates with ethnic Albanians, was gunned down outside his house.

More than 28,000 people were registered to vote, the AP news agency reported.

"As new mayor my first request will be to free Mr Oliver Ivanovic and all other unjustly held Serbs," Rakic told supporters at his campaign headquarters.

No incidents were reported during Sunday's election, for which a large number of European Union police and NATO soldiers was deployed, AFP reported.

**Allegiance refusal**

During the [initial poll](http://www.aljazeera.com/Services/System/?Rq=6)O7AzSe8-5HsdhiZjh-5XZnlFV9s-7=OOns(6h-6qNKtoXG3-38w5(ZM) on November 3, a group of masked men smashed polling stations and destroyed voting material.

The attack was blamed on Serb hardliners wanting to [disrupt the vote](http://www.aljazeera.com/Services/System/?Rq=6)O7AzSe8-5HsdhiZjh-5XZnlFV9s-7=OOns(6h-6q(DklGCB-40oA_rFa) because they feared it endorsed Kosovo's 2008 secession from Serbia.

The voted was annulled but the winner of the subsequent December 1 poll then forced a new vote after he refused to swear allegiance to Kosovo's predominantly ethnic-Albanian institutions.

Serbs in Kosovo's tense north defy rule by the capital, Pristina, and back a Serbian claim over the territory.
Serbia and Kosovo are locked in an EU-led effort to overcome their differences and move closer to eventual membership of the 28-member bloc.

As part of the talks, Serbia allowed its minority in four northern municipalities to vote in Kosovo elections despite strongly rejecting its secession, AP reported.

The four municipalities in the north have said they will create a union with another five Serb-controlled municipalities scattered elsewhere in Kosovo that would give the minority more say over daily affairs.

**Kosovo's Place in Serbian Elections Disputed (*BIRN*, 24 February 2014)**

Serbia and Kosovo remain at loggerheads over whether Serbian early parliamentary elections can be held in Serbian areas of Kosovo.

Serbia's Electoral Commisssion, RIK, told BIRN that early parliamentary elections due on March 16 will be organized also in the former province of Kosovo.
"There will be three members of the committee at each polling station in Kosovo and ballots will be taken for counting at voting centres in Vranje and Raska [in Serbia]," the RIK said.
Ivica Dacic, Serbia's outgoing Prime Minister, on Friday said that the elections should be organized in Kosovo with the help of international missions.
The Kosovo authorities strongly oppose the idea. Bekim Collaku, advisor to the Kosovo Prime Minister, said that no polling stations will open in Kosovo for the Serbian elections.
The authorities there will accept only "centers for collecting the ballots of those who have dual citizenship - that of Serbia and Kosovo," Collaku told RFE on Thursday.
The spat casts a stain on improved relations that have followed the signing of the Brussels agreement in April 2013, when Belgrade and Pristina signed a historic deal on the "normalisation" of their relations.

As part of the deal, locals in the Serb-run north of Kosovo for the first part took part in elections organized by the Kosovo authorities in November last year.
In the 2012 general elections in Serbia, Belgrade also organized elections in Kosovo.
The OSCE Mission in Pristina stated that the mission was capable of supporting the process of voting, in keeping with its mandate.

**Serbia, Macedonia mull further trade cooperation (*Xinhua*, 21 February 2014)**

BELGRADE -- Serbia and Macedonia have discussed ways to improve bilateral trade cooperation through elimination of tariff barriers, said a Serbian government statement issued Friday.

The statement came after a meeting between Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dacic and visiting Macedonia Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki in Belgrade.

Both sides believed that bilateral ties have significantly improved through intensified political dialogue and trade, the statement said.

Dacic told Poposki that the Serbian government considers the road and rail route infrastructure between the two countries of great importance, as well as connection systems for power transmission.

Dacic also said that police cooperation between the two countries in combating illegal migration, human trafficking, drug smuggling is already yielding results.

"They also discussed ways to improve trade cooperation, through the elimination of tariff barriers, better use of CEFTA mechanisms and joint appearance on third markets," said the statement.

**Bosnia's Serb Entity Immune From Protests? (*Institute for War and Peace Reporting,* by Maja Bjelajac, 21 February 2014)**

Both of Bosnia’s administrative territories face the same problems of unemployment and corruption, but only the Federation has seen protests so far.

Analysts say the anti-government protests taking place in many parts of Bosnia could well spread to the country’s predominantly Serb entity, Republika Srpska (RS).

This month’s protests spread quickly through the Federation, the larger administrative entity, inhabited mainly by Bosniaks and Croats. Around 300 people were injured and around 100 detained in rioting that left government buildings seriously damaged.

Protests – now peaceful – have continued in many parts of the Federation, with citizens demanding action on unemployment and corruption.

By contrast, the RS has not seen protests, with the exception of one rally in Banja Luka held in solidarity with Tuzla. It was attended by fewer than 200 people.

RS president Milorad Dodik said the protests were only a “problem for the Federation”, implying that people in his own entity had no reason to come out and demonstrate.

Dodik accused the international community of backing the demonstrations in order to create instability and thus justify increased intervention in Bosnia’s affairs.

His prime minister, Zeljka Cvijanovic, similarly asserted that RS was “stable and functional” and that the protests were purely the Federation’s problem.

Political analysts disagree, arguing that both Dodik and Cvijanovic are ignoring the fact that people in RS face identical problems to those in the Federation – unemployment, poverty, corruption and murky privatisations of state-owned companies.

With a population of 1.4 million, RS has over 150,000 people out of work, and there are as many citizens drawing pensions as there are in paid employment.

The average monthly income in RS stands at 820 Bosnian convertible marks (580 US dollars), which covers less than half the needs of a family of four.

Svetlana Cenic, a Banja Luka-based economist and former RS treasury minister, said that the absence of protests was the result of the government’s PR.

“RS citizens have been brainwashed into believing that if they demanded their money, they’d be seen as bad Serbs. And if they demanded both their money and their rights, they’d be perceived as traitors. No one wants to risk that,” she said.

However, Cenic argues that this dynamic cannot not last indefinitely.

“The more protests are postponed and the more arrogantly the authorities behave, the stronger the explosion will be once it happens,” she said. “People in RS are increasingly aware of the fact that those who are stealing from them while pretending to protect the interests of Bosnian Serbs are in fact their biggest enemies.”

Srdan Puhalo, a Banja Luka sociologist, agreed, adding that the RS authorities were trying to spread fears that any protests might lead to changes in the Bosnian constitution and eventually to the abolition of RS itself.

“The RS authorities are deliberately fueling paranoia among their citizens, so that any attempts to change things are subdued. This fear paralyses people and prevents them from taking any concrete action,” Puhalo said.

Nonetheless, he argued, an uprising would be possible if it were led by “someone perceived as a ‘good Serb’ whom the government cannot label a traitor or foreign mercenary”.

Dragan Bursac, a columnist with the online news portal Buka, is sceptical about the chances of people taking to the streets, even though they face the same economic problems as those in the Federation.

“They won’t do it – out of spite,” he explained. “Anti-government protests in RS could happen only if similar protests were not taking place in the Federation. This is a sad truth. Ninety-five per cent of RS citizens would rather be hungry than support their brothers in poverty on the other side of the ethnic divide.”

Bursac claimed that RS lacked a tradition of civil disobedience, with only “occasional small-scale protests that are strictly politically organised and controlled”.

But others note that there have in fact been public expressions of dissent in RS. In June 2013, for example 2,000 students took to the streets of Banja Luka to call for better study conditions, later broadening their demands and calling for an end to crime and corruption and more respect for human rights.

In November 2012, public sector workers marched in anger over a ten per cent salary cut. And protests against illegal construction in a city centre park some years ago quickly turned into demonstrations against crime and corruption lasting for several months.

However, none of these protests coalesced into to a fully-fledged uprising, nor did they yield any concrete results.

Miodrag Dakic, an environmental activist from Banja Luka, said the RS authorities were well aware of public discontent and were keen to head off any protests.

“At the slightest sign of possible social unrest, the government sends out the usual misinformation, claiming that some foreign enemy is trying to destroy RS and that they, the government, will not let that happen,” Dakic said. “Although this is such obvious manipulation, it works.”

**Maja Bjelajac is an RFE and IWPR reporter in Banja Luka.**

**Bosnia on fire (*Balkans group*, by Marko Prelec, 7 February 2014)**

The anger of Bosnia’s long-suffering people is finally spilling out onto the street. My friend and colleague from our days at International Crisis Group, Srećko Latal, has been [prophesying](http://www.sos.ba/) this for years and I have to admit I’ve been skeptical. Bosnian demonstrations usually peter out and they’ve never gotten close to mass public convulsions of the type you see in Athens or even Paris, not to mention Maidan Square or Tahrir. Last summer’s [ID-card protests in Sarajevo](http://www.crisisgroupblogs.org/across-eurasia/2013/06/07/id-politics-sarajevo-protest-shows-a-weakened-state/) aroused a lot of hopes but ended quickly.

This looks different. As I write, the cantonal government buildings are on fire in Tuzla, protesters have broken into the canton government in Sarajevo, there are massive demonstrations in Zenica and Bihać. About 200 policemen countrywide have been wounded, tear gas is on the streets. Tune in to Al Jazeera Balkans for [live coverage](http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/live-gore-zgrade-vlade-u-zenici-tuzli-sarajevu) (in Bosnian).

Interesting to note that all these cities have a large Bosniak majority. About 300 people gathered briefly in Serb-majority Banja Luka and a protest is scheduled in ethnically divided Mostar later today but so far, this seems to be a Bosniak event. Yet it has no visible nationalist component. All reports I’ve seen show people enraged with ineffective governments, corruption, poverty and general frustration. These problems, these feelings are general across Bosnia. So why is the river overflowing its banks only among one of the country’s peoples, at least for now?

Here’s a theory: it is because no other community is as marginalised, as disenfranchised and consequently as frustrated as the Bosniaks. There is almost nothing a Bosniak voter can do to affect government policy, which is set by more or less the same group of politicians year in and year out whatever the voters say. Governments are always large coalitions of a self-selecting elite. These people live quite well. In RS, voters may be as impoverished and as disenchanted with their leaders, but they know they can vote them out come this October – as they have in the past.

If that’s true, then the government system in the Federation of BiH needs a root and branch change, going far beyond the current reform proposals. One place to start: get rid of the cantons, which seem to be the target of much of the ire, and replace them with another vehicle to protect the interests of local communities (notably, the Croats for whom cantons function as a consolation prize for an entity of their own).

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