** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Friday, 7 March 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**UN: International forces in charge of security in Kosovo (*Novosti*)**

According to UNSCR 1244, the mandate for a safe and secure environment in Kosovo, continues to be entrusted to KFOR, Farhan **Haq**, deputy spokesperson of the UN Secretary-General **Ban** Ki-moon, stated. Commenting Pristina’s announcements regarding the formation of the Kosovo armed forces, Haq said that Ban’s office was informed about this.

**Next agreement with Prisitina on property (*Politika*)**

The next agreement between Belgrade and Pristina must be an agreement on property, outgoing Serbian Minister without Portfolio in charge of Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar **Vulic** said in the Serbian Chamber of Commerce. After the meeting with representatives of some 40 companies from Serbia proper and Vojvodina that sell their goods in Kosovo and Metohija, he said that they must discuss privatization that has been conducted in the southern Serbian province without the participation of the Serbs. The “Brussels 2” agreement must be an agreement on property, said Vulin, adding that the people in Kosovo and Metohija must be indemnified because privatization has not been conducted in accordance with the laws passed by UNMIK that are the only ones acceptable for Belgrade. “These things must be resolved and we expect to start working in Brussels on the agreement on property,” said Vulin. In cooperation with the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and the competent ministries, a comprehensive list of state and public property in Kosovo and Metohija was composed, which has 7000 pages, said Vulin. According to him, that agreement would deal with issues of privatization, public and state property, but also with the issue of private property that is very frequently damaged, usurped, destroyed. “Somebody certainly has to indemnify this,” said Vulin.

**Jablanovic: Pristina hampers formation of Union of Serb Municipalities (*Beta*)**

Leposavic Mayor Dragan **Jablanovic**, who is also the coordinator of the Management Team of the Union of Serb Municipalities has stated that they scheduled the sessions on determining the statute of municipalities and symbols (flag, stamp, logo, coat of arms) for 12 March in the municipalities in northern Kosovo. “The municipal assemblies of Kosovska Mitrovica, Zvecan, Zubin Potok and Leposavic examined the possibility of having a joint session, but they decided in the end to have them separately,” Jablanovic told ***Beta***. He says that the statutes of these municipalities differ, but are harmonized regarding the issue of the stamp on which the text for all municipalities is the same: the first line states “Kosovo” in accordance with UNSCR 1244, the second line states the name of the municipality, with the coat of arms of the municipality in the middle. “With the adoption of the statute and symbols of the municipal assemblies, all technical prerequisites will be created for the formation of the Union of Serb Municipalities,” said Jablanovic, adding this is being hampered by Pristina. “Pristina didn’t change its legislature that regulates this matter, i.e. there are no laws in the Kosovo constitution that regulate such unions, and we agreed in Brussels for the statute and Union of Serb Municipalities to be in accordance with the Kosovo laws and European standards,” said Jablanovic. He added there is simply no legal framework based on which the preamble of the statute on the formation of the Union would be written. Jablanovic points out that in case Pristina doesn’t fulfill the obligations under the Brussels agreement, consultations with Belgrade will follow. “If Pristina thinks to block the formation of the Union this way, we will certainly find a way to act; we will refer to the Brussels agreement or some EU charters. We are ready, the draft statute of the Union is practically complete, but we don’t have the text of the preamble,” concluded Jablanovic.

**DSS leader banned entrance according to law on foreign citizens (*Novosti*)**

The several-year-long “nerve game” between Belgrade and Pristina regarding visits to the southern province has been additionally complicated by the Kosovo authorities in this election campaign by referring to the law on foreigners. ***Novosti*** learns that the Kosovo border police and EULEX prevented the leader of the Democratic Party of Serbian (DSS) Vojislav **Kostunica** and DSS officials to visit Kosovo and Metohija based on that regulation. The Head of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar **Vulin** tells ***Novosti*** that, according to the applicable agreements, permits for visits to Kosovo and Metohija are only necessary for state officials. “There was not a single basis not to allow ‘citizen Kostunica’ to enter Kosovo and Metohija. We filed a protest and requested EULEX to explain what happened and to prevent such incidents in the future.” Vulin recalls that several days before Kostunica, the DSS vice president Nenad **Popovic** visited Kosovo without any problems. He says the international community must prevent Pristina from interpreting agreements as it wants. EULEX responds they are not the one that allows or ban visits to the province. “The EULEX Mission doesn’t even have the role of the ‘postman’ when it comes to requests for entering Kosovo and Metohija. They are sent to EU Offices in Belgrade and Pristina, while the Pristina authorities issue permits,” claims EULEX spokesperson Irina **Gudeljevic** and explains that the DSS officials can file a complaint to the decision to be “escorted” from the Kosovo and Metohija.

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**Additional inter-ethnic tensions should be avoided (*Oslobodjenje*)**

It is necessary to avoid additional rising of inter-ethnic tensions in B&H, it was concluded at the meeting of member of the B&H Presidency Bakir **Izetbegovic** and the Chairperson of the B&H House of Peoples Dragan **Covic** with the B&H Islamic and Catholic religious officials. The interlocutors noted at the meeting in Sarajevo that it is necessary to make maximal efforts at all levels of responsibility in order to create a society of equal constitutive nations and citizens. They concluded that it was, therefore, necessary to continue talks between political parties and religious institutions, with the goal of relaxing relations between the Croat and Bosniak nations in the Federation B&H, reads the statement of the HDZ B&H, whose leader is Covic. The statement adds that it is necessary to also continue talks towards relaxing relations between all three constitutive nations in B&H and towards building trust that is necessary in search of a solution for reorganizing the Federation B&H and for the difficult economic and social state-of-affairs in the FB&H and B&H. “They expressed at the meeting concern with the difficult economic and social, but also security situation of the B&H nations and citizens, which is a direct consequence of the present non-functional constitutional-legal organization of B&H,” reads the statement. It is the joint position that the key thing for resolving this situation in B&H is to organize B&H as a state of three equal nations. The meeting was also attended by the Archbishop of Sarajevo, Cardinal Vinko **Puljic**, and the Head of the B&H Islamic Community Husein **Kavazovic**.

**RS cabinet adopts bill on residence (*Srna*)**

The Republika Srpska (RS) cabinet adopted the bill on permanent and temporary residence in the RS. The reasons for bringing such a bill are contained in the need to overcome a legal gap and the current situation arising with the failure to bring a law which would in more detail and more adequately regulate this matter at the B&H level. The bill creates a legal framework which on the one hand enables all citizens to realize and protect their rights as guaranteed by the Constitution, and, on the other, enables state bodies to exercise their powers as stipulated by the Constitution and laws. The failure to bring a bill amending and supplementing the Law on Permanent and Temporary Residency of B&H Citizens, which is one of the basic acts on the basis of which citizens realize their rights as guaranteed by the Constitution, caused uncertainty and legal insecurity. As one cannot trust that a law at the B&H level will be brought in the near future, a bill on permanent and temporary residence in the RS was drafted, says a press release from the RS Government’s Press Office.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Kosovo to create national army of 5,000 soldiers (*Reuters*, by Fatos Bytyci, 4 March 2014)**

PRISTINA - Kosovo's government ordered the creation of a national army on Tuesday by upgrading a lightly armed civil response force six years after the majority-Albanian country seceded from Serbia.

The army will comprise 5,000 active soldiers and 3,000 reservists for a landlocked country of 1.7 million people bordering Serbia, Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia.

Kosovo's Western backers, which recognized it as independent in 2008, had been reluctant to see the immediate creation of an army for fear of the message it might send to Serbia and the more than 100,000 ethnic Serbs who still live in the young state.

Though Serbia does not recognize Kosovo as sovereign, relations between the two have improved over the past year with the agreement of a landmark accord brokered by the European Union.

Serbia has agreed to cede its de facto control over a northern pocket of Kosovo, in return for guaranteed rights for ethnic Serbs living there and the start of EU membership talks for Belgrade.

Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, addressing a meeting of his cabinet, said the move would benefit all Kosovars "regardless of their ethnic, religious or political orientation". Parliament is expected to endorse the decision later this month.

Thaci's Serbian counterpart, Ivica Dacic, however, said it was "not in accordance" with the Brussels accord.

Speaking to reporters at a business conference in the Serbian ski resort of Kopaonik, he said Belgrade had already asked NATO for a guarantee that no Kosovo army would be allowed to enter the mainly Serb north without permission from the Western alliance.NATO has not commented publicly on the request.

Any new army would have to work alongside a NATO peace force in Kosovo that currently numbers 5,000 soldiers. NATO has been trying to cut back its presence even further but has been thwarted by tensions in the north.

Kosovo already has the nucleus of a future army in the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), a lightly armed, 2,500-strong force tasked with crisis response, civil protection and ordnance disposal.

The new army would be composed of land forces, a national guard, logistics and training commands. It would have a budget of 65 million euros ($89.53 million) per year. There were no immediate details on the type of hardware and weaponry it might use.

Asked about the move, a NATO official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters in a written response: "The future of the KSF is an internal matter for local Kosovo institutions."

NATO arrived in Kosovo in June 1999 on the back of 78 days of air strikes to halt the killing and expulsion of ethnic Albanian civilians by Serbian forces fighting a two-year counter-insurgency war.

Kosovo became a ward of the United Nations before declaring independence in 2008. It has been recognized by more than 100 countries, but has been unable to join the United Nations due to the opposition of Serbian ally and U.N. veto-holder Russia.

**War crimes verdicts improve Kosovo-Serbia relations, experts say (*Southeast European Times*, by Safet Kabashaj and Ivana Jovanovic, 6 March 2014)**

The Belgrade court decisions on war crimes committed in Kosovo will help improve the relationship between Albanians and Serbs, experts and citizens said.

War crimes verdicts in Belgrade for crimes committed in Kosovo could trigger positive changes in Kosovo-Serbia relations, experts said, noting the recent verdict by the Belgrade High Court War Crimes Chamber, which convicted nine former members of the Sakali (Jackals) group.

On February 11th, the nine were found guilty of killing more than 120 ethnic Albanian civilians in the villages of Qyshk/Cuska, Zahac, Pavlan and Lubeniq/Ljubenic in west Kosovo in April and May 1999.

The nine "committed murders, rapes and robberies in an extremely brutal way, with the main goal to spread fear among Albanian civilians in order to force them to leave their homes and flee to Albania," Judge Snezana Nikolic Garotic said in her verdict.

The sentences for the nine men ranged from two to 20 years in prison. Defendant Toplica Miladinovic was sentenced to 20 years in jail, along with two others. Seven defendants were sentenced to between two and 15 years in jail, while two were cleared of all charges.

The father of Agim Ceku, the minister of the Kosovo Security Force, was among the victims.

"It is good news that Belgrade has gained the political power to prosecute war crimes cases that happened in Kosovo," Ceku told *SETimes*.

Dusan Janjic, director of the Belgrade-based Forum for Ethnic Relations, said that while cases like Sakali are a shock to the Serbian public, the "demolition of myths" will have positive consequences.

"Two positive trends will emerge once when this becomes the praxis of the rule of law. The first is the public's confidence in institutions and the rule of law. The second is a change to the hard prejudice about what happened in the war in Serbia, which will allow Serbs to start to view Kosovo from the perspective of economic co-operation, as a neighbour," Janjic told *SETimes*.

For the families of the victims, the reality shows a different approach regarding court verdicts, said Bekim Blakaj, executive director of the Humanitarian Law Centre in Kosovo. By providing witness reports and evidence in the trials, the victims' families tend to accept the courts' verdicts better.

"However, more important for the members of victims' families is the fact that the court proves responsibility for a crime. It's a public and legal admission that harm has been caused to these families," Blakaj told *SETimes*.

He said that future verdicts will have an impact on relations between the two nations.

"Public opinion in Serbia is changing. People are admitting the crimes committed against Albanians, and this creates a kind of empathy and solidarity with the victims," Blakaj said.

Bruno Vekaric, Serbia's deputy war crimes prosecutor, agreed.

"The patriotism which was talked about then caused huge moral damage to our people and, unfortunately, put Serbia in an international pillory. This verdict shows that completely different winds blow here now and that everyone who has blood on their hands will be punished for their crimes," Vekaric told reporters after the verdict.

Abdulla Ahmedi, a 28-year-old Albanian from Preshevo in south Serbia and an activist at the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, said war crimes cases need to be processed more quickly.

"Maybe establishing an independent, common body for Belgrade and Pristina to deal with war crimes and help victims could help and improve these processes," Ahmedi told *SETimes*.

**Rivals Battle For Third Place in Serbia Election (*Balkan Insight*, by Marija Ristic, 7 March 2014)**

Boris Tadic and Dragan Djilas, the former and current presidents of the Democratic Party, are battling for third place in the upcoming Serbian elections.

Boris Tadic, Serbia's former President and until recently the honorary president of the Democratic Party, and Dragan Djilas, the new leader of the Democrats, are jostling for third place in the elections on March 16.

While polls suggest the ruling Serbian Progressive Party is on course to win easily, with a coalition gathered around the Socialist Party in second place, it is unclear who will come third.

A survey presented this week by the Center for Free Elections and Democracy, CeSID, said the Progressive Party will win 44 per cent of votes, the Socialists will get 13 while all the others will win less than 10 per cent.

CeSID predicts that 8 per cent of voters will opt for Tadic and his New Democratic Party, while the Democrats will get only 7 per cent.

However, other surveys predict a different outcome, with Djilas and the Democrats winning 10 per cent and Tadic getting only 7 per cent.

Commenting on the various surveys, Djilas said that they “aim to influence voters and have no contact with reality,” repeating that he will beat Tadic’s party. “When someone leaves the Democrats it is normal that he is weak, not us,” Djilas said.

But, Tadic is equally optimistic, saying that his New Democratic Party will do better than the Democrats in the election.

Tadic quit as honorary president of the Democrats in January and left the party entirely, citing disagreements with new leadership.

He was Serbian President from 2004-2008 and again from 2008-2012. He was widely blamed for the party's defeat in 2o12, which happened, some said, because he concentrated too much power in his own hands.

In November 2012, Djilas took over as party leader. However, Tadic and his supporters have been struggling to regain control ever since.

**Future coalition question hangs over Serbia’s March 16 election (*The Sofia Globe*, by Clive Leviev-Sawyer, 6 March 2014)**

Since the official start of campaigning in the runup to Serbia’s ahead-of-schedule national parliamentary elections on March 16 2014, opinion polls have been unequivocal about which political force will get the most votes – but that does not mean any assumptions should be made about which parties will be in government.

The ruling Serb Progressive Party (SNS), headed by Aleksandar Vucic, is set for about 44 per cent of the vote, according to a March 3 poll by the Centre for Free Elections and Democracy.

The SNS is insisting that the elections are really about speeding economic reforms and creating an improved investment environment and have nothing to do with any domestic dramas. It also set on March 16 because local elections in Belgrade and two other municipalities were scheduled for that day, and argued that holding general elections at the same time would save money.

Other parties would have little trouble agreeing that economic reforms are a key issue, given the troubles facing Serbia’s economy.

The Democratic Party (DS), for instance – slated by the same poll for about seven per cent – has in the form of its leader Dragan Ðilas accused the current government of failing to deal with high unemployment, recently recorded as close to 29 per cent. Not only that, Ðilas has accused the rulers of being unforthcoming, more than once, about the true picture of unemployment in Serbia, and has described the government’s previous initiatives on reforms as nothing more than a series of false promises.

The coalition around the Serbian Socialist Party, led by outgoing prime minister Ivica Dacic, will get about 13 per cent of the vote, according to the poll.

On the campaign trail, Dacic has emphasised the need for job creation while protecting the rights of employees and pensioners, but also has underlined that reforms must not be of the kind that “eat people”.

Dacic, in office for 18 months at the head of government, can and does point to the achievement that he describes as the country’s most important in its recent history – Belgrade obtaining from Brussels a date for European Union membership talks. The early parliamentary elections were called about a week after the formal start of Serbia’s EU accession negotiations.

Among the range of other parties, the DS has had obvious problems of its own.

Serbia’s former president, Boris Tadic, quit the DS in late January to form his own New Democratic Party. The poll published on March 3 gave Tadic’s NDS eight per cent and the DS seven per cent.

Issues related to ultimate EU accession are, of course, not a simple winning factor in the complexities of Serbian politics.

While politicians in Belgrade are consistent in insisting that they will never recognise Kosovo as independent, an EU-brokered modus vivendi has been got on track, more or less, between Belgrade and Priština.

However, the course of the campaign also has seen an obvious line of attack – for example by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has accused Dacic of offering too much in compromises in talks with Kosovo prime minister Hashim Thaçi.

The LDP, meanwhile, is among the parties seen in the poll as having a chance of making it into the next Serbian parliament, with six per cent. Others are the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS, five per cent). The United Regions of Serbia (URS) and Dveri had four per cent each, according to the poll, below the five per cent threshold for entry into parliament.

About 6.7 million Serbians are eligible to vote in the election, including 300 000 expatriate Serbians, the latter able to vote at 35 polling stations to be set up in 20 countries. However, the rate of registration of expatriate Serbians is so low as to suggest that they will not be a factor in the outcome.

As with the previous six parliamentary elections and several presidential elections, an Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) team, of 40 members of parliaments from 15 OSCE countries, will be in Serbia to monitor the elections.

Voting will produce a new 250-member legislature, with a term of office scheduled to last until 2018.

But as to the coalition question, the SNS has adopted a firm policy of refusing to speculate about future election partners.

In turn, Dacic has declined to comment on whether his SPS would be part of a future ruling coalition, or to comment on what role he might have in that coalition – or even to speculate on which parties would make up this coalition.

“No one can say for sure how a new government would be formed. It would reflect the election results. I am convinced only that the SPS will achieve its best result since 2000, even better than in previous elections,” Dacic told local media.

**Serbia wins $1bn Abu Dhabi loan (*Reuters*, 6 March 2014)**

Abu Dhabi, Serbia has signed an agreement for a $1 billion loan from Abu Dhabi, the emirate's Department of Finance said on Thursday, boosting the Balkan country's drive to find investors from outside the euro zone.  
Serbian Finance Minister Lazar Krstic had said on Wednesday that the 10-year loan would be given at an interest rate of 2 percent.  
"This loan will provide new opportunities for cooperation and will develop economic and trade relations. It will support the Serbian economy and will provide numerous investment opportunities for the two sides. It will also support the goals of joint projects between the two countries," Krstic said in Thursday's statement.  
It would further encourage private and public sectors within the UAE to look for investment opportunities in Serbia, the statement said.  
The UAE approved a $400 million loan to Serbia in 2013, used for investment in irrigation throughout Serbia and loans for farmers for the purchase of agricultural equipment.  
Last year, state-owned Abu Dhabi carrier Etihad Airways acquired a $40 million, 49 percent stake in Serbian flag carrier JAT Airways, which was renamed as Air Serbia.  
In 2013 Belgrade announced arms deals with the UAE, including exports of armoured personnel carriers and the joint development of a guided surface-to-surface missile.  
For the UAE, the relationship offers an early back door route into the European Union, which Belgrade wants to join, and access to the former Yugoslavia's once mighty arms industry.  
Serbia, a country of 7.3 million people, hopes to join the EU by 2020. Investing there would offer the UAE a chance of eventual direct access to the huge EU market before costs rise and red tape descends.

**Where West failed, people power spurs change in Bosnia (*Reuters*, by Maja Zuvela and Daria Sito-Sucic, 6 March 2014)**

MOSTAR/SARAJEVO - The front line in Mostar during the Bosnian war ran north-south, along a road parallel with the emerald waters of the Neretva River. Catholic Croats held the west and Muslim Bosniaks the east, much as they do today.

Under socialist Yugoslavia, the road was called Boulevard of the People's Revolution, but as the people splintered along ethnic and sectarian lines, so it became simply 'Bulevar'.

Two decades on, Bulevar remains an unofficial borderline between Croats and Bosniaks in a town that symbolizes more than any other the dysfunction of post-war Bosnia.

Now, in a cultural center built from the rubble of this road, there's again talk of revolution, with the revival of a discredited socialist phenomenon - the plenum - in a form a world away from the secretive party gatherings of yesteryear.

Each day for weeks now, residents - mainly Bosniaks but some Croats too - have gathered here in what they call a plenum, or citizens' forum, to vent anger at their elected leaders and at factory closures, lost jobs and unpaid wages.

"Our joint struggle shows that the spirit of a free Mostar is not broken," Karlo Grabovac, an unemployed computer technician, said. "Change is possible, but it cannot happen overnight. This is just the beginning of a painful awakening."

It's a model being replicated in towns across this country of 3.8 million people in the wake of violent protests in early February, when rioters gave voice to deep anger at the unemployment, corruption and political inertia that have dogged Bosnia since the war ended in 1995.

Many people inside and outside Bosnia hope it will enable Bosnians to cast off ethnically-based politics and fulfill their hopes of joining the European Union, which fellow-ex-Yugoslav republic Croatia did last year.

Dubbed the Bosnian Spring by some, a Balkan 'Occupy' by others, the movement is overwhelmingly Bosniak and has struggled to gain ground among Bosnia's Croats and especially Serbs, who were big winners in the peace deal brokered by the United States in the heat of battle.

Yet on Friday, around 2,000 people took to the streets in the main Bosnian Serb city of Banja Luka for the first time to demand better status for ex-soldiers, higher wages and pensions and revision of privatization deals which led to factories closing amid allegations the new owners had siphoned off cash.

WARNINGS, THREATS

Politicians, particularly in the country's Serb Republic and in Croat areas of the Bosniak-Croat Federation in the other half of Bosnia, warn voters the plenums will rewrite the peace deal in league with Bosnia's Western overseer to their detriment. The protesters disagree.

"We are not destructive elements, we are not a threat to the integrity of the Serb Republic, we have not been instructed by international power centers," said Dusko Vukotic, president of the war veterans' association leading the Banja Luka protest.

"But we are raising our voices against crime and to defend our rights."

All participants are seeking change from the bottom-up, breaking with years of failed, top-down Western intervention.

An unprecedented experiment in direct democracy, it has already won results, from curbing official perks to persuading local assemblies to consider replacing local governments overthrown by people power with technocrats.

Plenums, launched by a group of young activists, soon drew people of all ages and walks of life. Pensioners, the unemployed, war veterans and young people come with ideas to make government become fairer and more efficient.

Ad-hoc working groups then draft a list of requests and forward them to the cantonal assemblies for consideration.

Most importantly, they have rejected the ethnic labels that have dominated Bosnian politics since the deal that ended the war split power between the three warring sides and sowed the seeds of the February unrest.

"A social revolution happened here," Igor Stiks, a Sarajevo-born writer and senior research fellow at the University of Edinburgh in Britain, told Bosnian state television.

"Changes will not happen quickly, there is no magic wand, but for the first time social issues have prevailed over the national. This is the greatest achievement."

While hundreds queue daily to take part in a plenum in the capital Sarajevo, it is Mostar that encapsulates the potential of the movement and the challenges it faces.

Divided since the war, Mostar has two electricity providers, two telephone networks, two postal services and two education systems, one for each side of the river in a town of just 72,000 people.

It is a system of divide and rule that feeds networks of political patronage, as ethnic-based parties dole out public sector jobs to the party faithful and their families, resisting outside efforts to reunite the town.

So it wasn't easy for Grabovac, born to a Croat family, to attend the mainly Bosniak plenum on Bulevar.

"I received so many threats," said the 50-year-old. "For me, there is no east or west Mostar, no Bosniak or Croat side. I feel no affiliation to any ethnic group. I'm just trying to heal this town."

Grabovac is one of a handful of Croats who participate.

That both sides of Mostar are dissatisfied was clear on the night of February 7, when rioters torched both the HDZ party headquarters and that of the main Bosniak party, the SDA. Government buildings went up in flames in Sarajevo and other towns.

Initially, Croats joined the Mostar plenum in the wake of the unrest. But many dropped out due to intimidation.

"They tried to silence me, but they cannot stop me," said Josip Milic, a Bosnian Croat professor who was beaten with baseball bats by unknown attackers after attending the protests in Mostar.

The Mostar regional government has resisted calls to resign. But in other areas, the movement is already seeing results."

ATOM OF RENEWAL"

At the behest of residents, powerful local governments have fallen in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihac and Zenica, and cantonal assemblies there have accepted requests from plenums to form governments of non-party technocrats, though have yet to do so.

They also agreed to cut, from March, some of the perks enjoyed by public officials, such as the practice of paying elected officials for a year after the end of their term in office. In Tuzla they have already done it, saving an amount equal to the annual budget for culture and education.

In most towns, reviews have been ordered of the murky privatization process, to many Bosnians an exercise in state-sponsored plunder.

Participants say their aims are limited to issues at the local level, but in many cases the problems they want to rectify have their roots in the labyrinthine system of power-sharing set down by the 1995 peace deal.

This feeds a public administration of 180,000 people, whose salaries account for more than a fifth of national output.

Ethnic checks and balances frequently paralyze government, deterring foreign investment and contributing to an unemployment rate of at least 27 percent.

The European Union, Bosnia's main sponsor and the bloc it aspires to one day join, says the system is unsustainable, but has for years been at a loss to change it.

"The fact that citizens have taken to the streets and a gathering in plenums to express their dissatisfaction shows that democracy has taken roots amongst the people," Bosnia's international peace overseer, Valentin Inzko, said on Friday.

"This is one of the most positive developments in the recent history of this country," the Austrian diplomat said.

With ethnically based political parties still dominating the political scene and elections not due until mid-October, it's too early to tell what role the forums might play.

But Drenko Koristovic, a former soldier out of work for the past 18 years now in the Sarajevo plenum, indicated some of those now in power may face a harder task at the polls.

"There is a drastic difference between the small circle of people that has robbed this country of its assets - and we know who they are - and 90 percent of people who have nothing to eat," he said.

**Ukrainians, take it from a Bosnian: the EU flag is just a rag in the wind (*The Guardian*, by Andrej Nikolaidis, 3 March 2014)**

*If it's anything like Bosnia, Ukrainians will find the world lining up to help, but they could be paying back the debt for many years*

Jorge Luis Borges once said that a true gentleman is interested in lost causes only. If you're looking for a decent contemporary lost cause, you will surely find it in Ukraine, since if it comes to war, no matter who wins, most of the ordinary people will be losers.

We, the citizens of Bosnia, can tell you a thing or two about being losers. It was April 1992, during the start of Sarajevo's siege. I was a long-haired teenager, dressed in blue jeans and a shirt with the famous black and white "Unknown Pleasures" print. From the window of my suburban flat, I was watching the Yugoslav People Army's cannons, located in the Lukavica army camp, firing projectiles on Sarajevo. That army was controlled by Slobodan Miloševiæ, the president of Serbia.

The National Radio was broadcasting Bosnian president Alija Izetbegoviæ's discussion with Yugoslav army general Milutin Kukanjac. Izetbegovic asked the army to stop the bombing. Kukanjac claimed that not a single shot was fired from his army positions. I remember like it was yesterday that my glass of milk was jumping on the table to the rhythm of cannonballs "not fired" on Sarajevo.

When common people find themselves in the middle of a geopolitical storm – as the citizens of Ukraine do now, or my family back then in Bosnia – the dilemma "is this glass half empty or half full?" is irrelevant: soon, it will be broken.

The people in Bosnia were so full of optimism during the first days, even months, of war. Neighbours were saying that the west would never allow it to happen because "we are Europe". My aunt went to Belgrade, but refused to take her money from a Sarajevo bank. It will be over in a week; we'll be back soon, she said. President Izetbegovic, in his TV address to the people, said: "Sleep peacefully: there will be no war."

Well, we woke up after a four-year nightmare.

Now, the events in Ukraine seem to us Bosnians like a terrifying deja vu. The parallels between Ukraine now and Bosnia in 1992 are obvious. The Russian army acted aggressively towards Ukraine, as Miloševiæ's army did in Bosnia. Putin had strong support in parts of Ukraine, as Miloševiæ had in large parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Now Kiev has the support of the EU and the US, as Sarajevo did. We even had Bono and Pavarotti singing about Miss Sarajevo. Yet all the musical telegrams of support from the free world didn't stop the ethnic cleansing in eastern Bosnia, close to the Serbian border.

Behind the bloody curtain of Bosnian and other Balkan wars, the transition from the Yugoslav version of socialism to capitalism took place, managed by the EU troika. Behind the ballet of masses on Kiev squares and Russian army manoeuvres, there is a clear economic logic. Brussels asked Kiev to sign a free-trade pact with the EU. That was a good deal for EU, but clearly not for Ukraine. Then, Moscow offered Kiev a helping hand, with all the strings in the world attached: £9bn of aid, a reduction of gas prices by 30% and major business deals for the Ukrainian industry. Then Viktor Yanukovych declined the European offer. And the Euro-Maidan movement rose...

As the economist Michael Roberts notes, "the people of Ukraine are left with Hobson's choice: either go with KGB-led crony capitalism from Russia or go with equally corrupt pro-European 'democrats'".

Roberts predicts that Ukraine's foreign debt is about to double, "as it takes on new debt from the IMF and the cost of existing dollar and euro-debt jumps as the hryvnia is devalued". It hardly comes as a surprise to us in former Yugoslavia. At the beginning of its dissolution, the Yugoslav foreign debt was £9.5bn; today, after all the "help" we got from the troika, it's more than £107bn.

In their struggle to overcome Russian occupation and survive all the Trojan horses from the institutions of global capitalism, it is to be hoped that people in Ukraine learned a thing from the war in Bosnia – that a deus ex machina from the west will never land, solving the situation and leading them into the promised land of the EU.

Bosnia today is a poor and divided country, even more so than it was back in 1992. Former soldiers, hungry and sick, are gathering and protesting. "While we were bleeding, they were stealing," says one. In the past, they were ready to die for their nation and its bright future. Some Bosnians saw their future under the Bosnian and EU flag, others under the Croatian and EU flag, and others still under the flag of The Great Serbia. Lots of flags, but only one poverty for all.

Now they know: the flag is just a rag in the wind. And yes, the only true gentlemen are always the losers.

**Montenegrins in Kosovo Seek Official Status (*BIRN*, by Dusica Tomovic, 7 March 2014)**

Kosovo's small Montenegrin community is seeking constitutional recognition and a share of the allocated seats for minorities in the Kosovo parliament.

Montenegrin associations in Kosovo filed a joint initiative for consolidation of the community's legal status in the country on Thursday.

The initiative was submitted to President Atifete Jahjaga, the speaker of the Assembly, Jakup Krasniqi, and the Prime Minister, Hashim Thaci.

Since 1999, the international community has classified Montenegrins in Kosovo as Serbs. Following the international example, Kosovo's constitution does not mention Montenegrins as a separate ethnic community.

“Constitutional recognition of the existence of the Montenegrin community and assignment of an adequate number of reserved seats for representatives of Montenegrins in parliament would significantly contribute to improving the situation of our communities,” the initiative said.

Representatives of the Montenegrin community urged the Kosovo authorities to reformulate the initiative into a constitutional amendment and submit it to parliament. About 20,000 Montenegrins live in Kosovo.

Montenegro recognised Kosovo's independence in October 2008 and they established diplomatic relations two years later.

But Montenegro still has only a charge d’affaires in Pristina, not an ambassador. Montenegro has said no ambassador will be sent until the demand for Montenegrins to enjoy separate minority status in Kosovo’s parliament is met.

Prime Minister Thaci said he had no objections to the demand. “From the start, we have favoured incorporation of the Montenegrin community into the constitution and this will happen," he said in February.

"With the expected amendments, both the Montenegrin and the Croatian communities will be part of the Constitution of Kosovo,” the Prime Minister added.

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