** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Monday, 10 March 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**Dacic: Brussels agreement didn’t abolish right of Serbs to vote (*Novosti*)**

“The parliamentary elections will also be organized in Kosovo and Metohija. The Serbs will be able to exercise their voting right and to elect their government. The Brussels agreement didn’t abolish to the Serbs the right to vote in their own country, as claimed by Edita **Tahiri**. As in the past, the Serbs will take part in these elections,” outgoing Serbian Prime Minister Ivica **Dacic** told ***Novosti***.

**Dacic : Belgrade and Pristina to resume dialogue after elections (*Tanjug*)**

Dacic said that Belgrade and Pristina would resume their dialogue in Brussels after the Serbian parliamentary elections. “The next meeting will be on political issues as it is necessary to see who wants the situation in Kosovo and Metohija to be stabilized and who is always trying to take one step forward and two backwards,” said Dacic. He assessed the arrest of the SDP leader Oliver Ivanovic as a destabilizing factor in Kosovo and Metohija. Such a stand towards Serbs represents an attack on their human rights, but is also impeding the implementation of the Brussels agreement, said Dacic. He said he would ask EULEX to allow Serbian government representatives to visit Ivanovic, who has been on a hunger strike in prison in Pristina for five days now.

**Vulin: Elections to be held in Kosovo and Metohija as in 2012 (*Novosti*)**

Outgoing Serbian Minister in charge of Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar **Vulin** confirmed that the Serbian parliamentary elections, due on 16 March, would be held in Kosovo and Metohija as well, as in 2012. He said Pristina was trying to raise unnecessary tension on the election issue due to its internal political needs. In Kosovska Mitrovica, Vulin, the head of the North Banat Administrative District Vladimir **Ilic** and Acting Director of the Inter-municipal Centre for Social Work of Kosovska Mitrovica Dejan **Djinovic** signed an agreement on a charity donation for people in Kosovo and Metohija.

**Serb political representatives demand transfer of Ivanovic (*RTS/Tanjug*)**

The Management Team for the Union of Serb Municipalities, the head of the Kosovska Mitrovica District and the mayors of the four municipalities in northern Kosovo have requested the international representatives in the province to immediately transfer Oliver Ivanovic from a detention unit in Pristina to a detention unit in Kosovska Mitrovica. Ivanovic has been on a hunger strike for seven days and his health condition is questionable, which means that any delay of the decision to transfer him could result in his condition worsening and his life being in danger, the representatives warned at a meeting in Zvecan. “If this minimal request cannot be granted, we wonder what we can hope for in the communication with international representatives in Kosovo and Metohija regarding the rights of Serbs in this territory in the future, and whether maintaining any communication with them makes sense,” said a statement from the session. Granting the request would be a positive signal to the Serbs regarding the credibility of EULEX, the European Commission in Kosovo and Metohija and other international representatives, the statement said.

**Raska-Prizren Eparchy concerned about Oliver Ivanovic (*RTS*)**

The Raska-Prizren Eparchy has expressed deep concern over the seriously aggravated health condition of the SDP leader Oliver **Ivanovic**, and the inhumane treatment he has been exposed to in the Pristina prison, because of which he has been on a hunger strike in prison in Pristina for six days. The Eparchy announced they would address international institutions to deal with the issue, as Ivanovic himself was always willing to cooperate with those institutions and constantly pointed to the need of a joint life of Kosovo Serbs and Albanians.

**Borislav Pelevic on a hunger and thirst strike at Jarinje crossing (*Politika/Tanjug*)**

The leader of the Patriotic Front Borislav **Pelevic** started yesterday a hunger and thirst strike at the Jarinje administrative crossing because the Kosovo authorities didn’t allow him to enter Kosovo and Metohija. “The so-called Kosovo police issued a document to MP Pelevic on banning entrance into the so-called state of Kosovo,” reads the statement. Pelevic started a hunger and thirst strike with the goal of showing the Serbian public what are the consequences of the Brussels agreement. He said he would not stop with the strike until he is allowed to enter Kosovo and Metohija where he was born and for which, as he stressed, he had fought all his life.

**Election duel: SNS vs DSS (*Danas*)**

The state of Serbia doesn’t recognize nor will it recognize the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo and Metohija, member of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) Marko **Djuric**, who is also member of the state team for negotiations with Pristina and the implementation of the Brussels agreement, claims in ***Danas’*** election duel. The vice president of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) Slobodan **Samardzic** and former minister for Kosovo and Metohija Slobodan Samardzic tells ***Danas’*** election duel that the “project of the Union of Serb Municipalities is a big scam contained in the Brussels agreement.”

**Why is the 2012 model, against which members of the Republican Electoral Commission (RIK) from the SNS, DSS and the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) voted at the time while Kosovo Serbs claimed they received the status of “a non-legalized Diaspora,” is the most desirable model for the Serbian elections on 16 March in Kosovo and Metohija?**

**Djuric**: “That model is certainly not the most desirable one, but at this moment represents practice and standard that had been previously established. Unfortunately, opportunities for discussing the most desirable solutions have been missed over the past period and we are today in a position to have to discuss, under difficult circumstances, available and possible solutions. Many in Pristina are trying to dispute the 2012 model as exceeded, but it represents now for Serbia a practice that contains at the least the minimum of acceptance. The most important thing for us now is that all our citizens in Kosovo and Metohija, who wish to vote at the upcoming parliamentary elections, will be able to do so in the simplest possible way. Our people have demonstrated great political maturity at the local elections in the province, and they will have the opportunity to confirm it also at the parliamentary elections. We will accept absolutely the will of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija.”

**Samardzic**: “The DSS doesn’t consider this ‘model’ desirable at all. On the contrary, it considers it to be very suspicious when it comes to usual democratic election procedure. It doesn’t guarantee elementary control of elections during their conducting and the counting of votes. Namely, apart from three members of the election board, representatives of other parties taking part in the elections will not be able to be present at the polling station. The results are not counted on the spot but in two towns outside, Vranje and Raska. Such ‘procedure’ enables forgery of election results. The RIK accepted this at the request of the OSCE, but the SNS and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) certainly stand behind this, since democratic control of the elections in Kosovo and Metohija doesn’t suit them. So much about domestic and European democracy.”

**Is the Brussels agreement enabling Serbia to pass the announced constitutional law, whereby it will regulate the legal status of the future Union of Serb Municipalities in the Serbian legislature?**

**Djuric**: “The Brussels agreement implies the adjustment of legal frameworks so I see no obstacles on this side for regulating the legal status of the Union, naturally in a manner that would make it recognizable in the constitutional and legal arrangement of the Republic of Serbia, and until then we still need to negotiate, as a pre-condition, numerous important issues regarding the establishment of specific competencies of the Union stemming from the Brussels agreement.”

**Samardzic**: “The project of the Union of Serb Municipalities is a big scam contained in the Brussels agreement. According to it, all activities regarding the formation of the Union, including local elections in Serb municipalities, are taking place according to the laws of Albanian Kosovo. That is a result of the glorious struggle of Vucic and Dacic for Serbian interests in the province. Under such circumstances, the constitutional law can only recognize an independent Kosovo.”

**Why do the current authorities in Belgrade see in regional decentralization of the self-declared Kosovo state a solution for the status of Serbs in Kosovo and** **Metohija?**

**Djuric**: “This question contains a wrong premise that has been set with the direct intention of misleading the reader. The state of Serbia doesn’t recognize nor will it recognize the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo and Metohija. Our position and relation towards the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina is determined by the Serbian Constitution, international law and resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council. Regional decentralization is a model that has been widely accepted and applied in the internal organization of many European states and there is no reason not to apply it in our country as well. We are looking for solutions where we think it is only possible to find at this moment.”

**What does the DSS suggest specifically as an alternative to the Brussels agreement and the Union?**

**Samardzic**: “First of all, the Constitutional Court needs to be freed from political pressure and enable it to pass decisions on the remaining Brussels agreements. We don’t see legal reasons according to which the remaining agreements would be assessed differently from the agreement on cadasters, i.e. as non-constitutional. In that case, their further implementation can be done only with political violence against the Constitution. Returning this issue to its constitutional-legal frameworks would be a beginning of the struggle of the state for its legitimate interests in the province. I was in Gracanica last Monday, where I was supposed to hold a debate, but the police threatened with a violent abruption of the gathering. That is proof that Kosovo south of the Ibar River is in a regime of occupation. The situation north of the Ibar River is like, let’s say, semi-occupation, contributed by the present Serbian government. That is why I stress that one should distinguish between occupation and capitulation.”

**In your opinion, where are Serbia’s southern borders after the signing of the Brussels agreement?**

**Djuric**: “The borders of the Republic of Serbia are not determined by Marko Djuric or any other Serbian or world politician individually, but these borders are defined by international law, the Constitution and laws of our state. The southernmost border point of the Republic of Serbia will continue to be in the region of the Rastelica settlement, Dragas municipality.”

**Samardzic**: “The Brussels agreement is not a valid legal document, which, I am sure, will also be shown by the decision of the Constitutional Court. Therefore, it is not legally significant for anything, the least for changing our state borders. Borders are where they are determined by valid state and international documents, the Serbian Constitution, the UN Charter and UNSCR 1244.”

**When do you expect the signing of a legally-binding agreement on all-encompassing normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, which is the EU condition, and will this be in accordance with the Serbian Constitution?**

**Djuric**: “I would not like to bid with dates of signing and content of the agreement that we have not even started to negotiate yet.”

**What do you think about the signing of a legally-binding agreement on all-encompassing normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina?**

**Samardzic**: “That is the last document in a series of moves of this and previous governments in the phase recognition of Kosovo as an independent state. Each state would refuse to even discuss that, least to sign it. It is needless to say this would be an unconstitutional document, since it is anti-state by definition. But, precisely because of that, many politicians are speaking today about the need to amend the Constitution.”

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**Dodik: There will be no “Dayton 2” (*Srna*)**

The Republika Srpska (RS) President Milorad **Dodik** has stated there will not be another Dayton and that such a thing could not be organized under the current circumstances in international relations. “The main problem is that what was specified in the Dayton Peace Agreement has never been implemented and what was written down has started to crumble. The blame for non-functioning should be taken only by the international factor, which tried to create an illusion about B&H, but that illusion is constantly falling apart and that’s why everyone is trying to create some kind of agreement about it,” Dodik told ***Srna*** commenting on the messages by some of the former and current international officials that it was time for another Dayton. “It is clear that the support to various gatherings of citizens given by the foreigners and the requests to institute a new constitutional system means that a synchronized action is at hand. We mustn’t be naive to believe that this has not been coordinated,” Dodik said, adding that it was obvious that calls for another Dayton were drawing energy from one center that had designed those activities.  
The RS President says the Dayton Peace Agreement as an international treaty must be implemented, and not freely interpreted. “The RS has sufficient competences to defend its constitutional position. Only relaxed and softened politics can incur the biggest damage to the RS, and I am certain that won’t happen,” underlined Dodik.

**B&H Border Police and Directorate for Police Coordination (*Oslobodjenje/Patria*)**

As of this morning, B&H practically doesn’t have two state institutions, the B&H Border Police and the B&H Directorate for Coordination of Police Bodies, ***Patria*** reports. Namely, the mandates of the heads of these two institutions Vinko **Dumancic** and Himza **Selimovic**, which operate under the B&H Ministry of Security, expired on 9 March, as well as to their deputies, but the B&H Council of Ministers has not passed a decision on the appointment of new heads or acting heads. The two institutions of vital importance for the functioning of the state do not have a legitimate leadership, and nobody in them is authorized to sign documents and to pass decisions. In such a complex security situation, as described by the B&H Council of Minister in their recent conclusions, the situation could further undermine the security system, especially if one takes into account the recent terrorist attack on the B&H Presidency building.

**Obradovic: Croatia’s thin evidence (*RTS*)**

The Head of the Serbian team before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Croatia-Serbia genocide case, said after Croatia had given its oral argument that evidence presented by the country is rather “thin and weak.” Obradovic told ***Radio Television of Serbia*** (RTS) on Friday that grave accusations were made by Croatia over the week but that the public had the opportunity to see that the evidence the country based its case on is rather thin. Serbia will begin presenting its case on Monday and for the rest of the week present its counter-claim arguing that the Croatian authorities committed genocide against Serbs from the Knin Krajina during Operation Storm in August 1995. Obradovic said that “the public will be rather surprised” when the Serbian side starts talking about the events about which “nothing could be heard last week.” “Our team will not be denying next week that serious crimes were committed. What we will be denying is the context of the events in which they were committed and the evidence that we believe is weak - I speak not, of course, about the evidence confirmed by The Hague Tribunal, but rather about other evidence, which Croatia offers. Of course, we will be denying that the crimes were committed with genocidal intent,” Obradovic said. He expressed the hope that the Croatian side will show the same approach in its observations on Serbia's counter-claim, “instead of claiming that in Operation Storm the Serbs were being killed by Serbs, as it happened in the previous, written phase of the proceedings.”

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Devastated Serbia economy puts hope in election and reform (*AFP*, 10 March 2014)**

LOZNICA, Serbia -- The devastated Viskoza factory in western Serbia was once a proud symbol of Serbian industry. Today, its deserted complex resembles a post-apocalyptic movie set -- a painful reminder of Serbia's ailing economy ahead of early polls on March 16.

The factory in the western town of Loznica -- a dozen gigantic production halls now ghostly empty -- used to employ 11,000 people and was the economic mainstay of the region.

Dishevelled boxes full of chemical products that never reached customers are scattered across the concrete grounds. Weeds grow out of the paths and everything that could be reused or sold -- including windows, taps and pipes -- has been stolen.

The bloody Balkan wars of the 1990s, followed by international economic sanctions, halted production at the factory.

A bungled attempt to move it from public to private hands hammered the last nail into Viskoza's coffin, leading it to bankruptcy and eventual closure in 2005.

An official of Serbia's Privatisation Agency, which is responsible for the factory, told AFP it is unlikely ever to be revived.

The only part of the complex that was successfully sold was the power plant, which once supplied electricity to the entire town. It was bought by a Belgrade-based company for one million euros ($1.37 million) in 2007.

"But it does not work. They owe us 22 months in unpaid wages," Radosav Marjanovic, a worker in the plant, told AFP.

With many of Serbia's 179 state-owned companies struggling, Viskoza is far from the only site that needs rejuvenation.

Having started EU accession talks in January, the government pushed through a stringent austerity package of privatisation, subsidy cuts and tax increases in a bid to reduce spending and get people back to work.

Unemployment has reached 20.1 percent in the country of 7.2 million. Many more are stuck in the so-called "grey economy", where salaries are often delayed and there are no health or retirement benefits.

In some areas in the underdeveloped south, the unemployment rate exceeds 50 percent, while those lucky enough to have a job struggle to survive on the average salary of 350 euros ($480) a month.

With such controversial reforms now to be implemented, the ruling Serbian Progressive Party has called early parliamentary elections on March 16, hoping for a strong mandate to push ahead with its pro-European austerity programme.

The weakness of the opposition means it looks set for victory, but the future of Serbia's economy remains uncertain.

- Waiting for 'Superman' miracle -

For Loznica, hope has shifted rather desperately to a "Superman" mineral.

In 2006, the Rio Tinto mining company found large reserves of jadarite -- a mineral used in mobile phone batteries -- in the region, raising hopes that it would set up a mine.

Jadarite, a mineral said to have the same chemical composition as "kryptonite", the fictional rock used to hurt Superman in comic books, is highly sought throughout the world.

But Rio Tinto has made no public statements on the subject since 2012, when it said it was still considering the costs of setting up the mine.

For locals, there is nothing to do but wait and hope.

Many have turned to agriculture, but a lack of government support means they are stuck at subsistence level.

Ivanko Jankovic, a former Viskoza employee, thinks it is too late for his former factory to return.

He remembers the days when a "flow of people walked along this path to work," but now says it looks like a "nuclear bomb was dropped here".

"Everything is ruined. It is impossible to relaunch production. We have tried everything to attract investors, but in vain," he said.

He sees Rio Tinto as the only chance for a positive future.

"The opening of the mine would employ people, it is our only hope," he said.

**Kosovo national team cause a stir by posing with guns before first ever international fixture (*The Independent*, by Jack de Menezes, 7 March 2014)**

*Members of the Kosovo national team pose with guns at a shooting range ahead of their first ever international, against Haiti*

Kosovo fired a blank against Haiti in their 0-0 draw but a picture of them holding handguns at a shooting range has caused quite a stir in neighbouring Serbia

Kosovo created a moment of history this week when they took part in their first ever international football match, having been approved by Fifa as a recognised nation.

They drew the match against Haiti 0-0, but having had their first taste of the international stage, they’ll be gunning for their first victory in their next match.

However, a picture that has emerged of a selection of players posing at a shooting range before the game has caused quite a stir, with reports that an image of them holding guns has gone viral in neighbouring country Serbia.

At a time of great political uncertainty and with eyes in Belgrade looking on, the timing of the picture isn’t the greatest. Saying that, when is the best time to pose with handguns?

They are yet to call on their best known player, Manchester United's Adnan Januzaj, with the 19-year-old winger yet to make up his mind over who he will play for. He is currently available for Kosovo, Belgium, Albania and Serbia, while if he holds out a few more years he could soon be wearing the Three Lions of England under residency grounds.

**Serbia Asks FIFA to Scrap Kosovo Friendlies (*Balkan Insight*, by Nemanja Cabric, 7 March 2014)**

*Serbia's Football Association has asked FIFA to scrap a decision to allow Kosovo to play friendly matches on the grounds that a Serbian flag was torched at the match in Mitrovica*

Belgrade Serbia's Football Association, FSS, has written to FIFA, asked it to cancel a decision to allow Kosovo's national team to play friendly matches.

The FSS said the Serbian flag was set on fire before Kosovo's first such friendly, played in Mitrovica, northern Kosovo, against Haiti.

The match, which ended in a draw, was watched by the President and Prime Minister of Kosovo.

The flag-burning was "a direct act of attack on the Republic of Serbia, our citizens and our statehood," the Serbian letter to FIFA said.

According to them, Kosovo also did not respect an agreement with Serbia not to display any national emblems of Kosovo at the friendly game, either on players' outfits or at the stadium.

"Before the game, in front of the stadium, fans set the Serbian flag on fire and insulted the symbols of our country. During the game, the fans of the home team also shouted racist remarks against Serbian nation and state," the FSS letter continued.

Serbia's flag was also burned recently at the friendly match in St Gallen, Switzerland, by fans of the Croatian national team.

The Croats said they burned the Serbian flag in riposte to a remark by the Serbian sports minister, Željko Jovanovic, that he "didn’t see the burning of the Croatian flag during the World Cup 2014 Qualification match with Croatia in Belgrade."

"Will you see it now?," the fans wrote in a message on a large banner displayed under the burning flag.

The toching of the flag was also allegedly followed by shouts of "Za dom spremni" [Ready for the homeland] and "Hajmo Ustase" [Let's go, Ustashe] - slogans of the Fascist regime in Croatia during World War 2.

The Serbian Association has not written to FIFA about the behavior of the Croatians fans, however.

**Serb Fighters in Crimea Deserve Jail, Minister Says (*Balkan Insight*, 7 March 2014)**

A Serbian minister said volunteers from Serbia who have joined pro-Russian self-defence groups in the disputed Ukrainian region of Crimea should face jail terms.

A small group of five Serbian volunteers on Friday sent an open statement on arriving in the Crimean port of Sevastopol, declaring that their role was “to patrol roads and control vehicles and passengers at checkpoints”.

The group said that two Russians had come from the Russian city of Nizhny Novgorod to join the Serbian group - the first of many expected additions.

“More and more volunteers are showing interest in joining us. Slowly but surely our group is becoming a unit,” the group announced.

Njegos Popovic, from the Chetnik movement, told the Serbian daily newspaper Politika that the group had not gone to Crimea to fight but to offer ethnic Russians there moral support.

However, Rasim Ljajic, a deputy prime minister, said if Serbs went to the Crimea, it would impact on Serbia's diplomatic position and such behavior should be sanctioned.

“The departure of our citizens for wars in other countries or to join foreign military forces should be to sanctioned, and we should amend criminal code to allow that,” Ljajic said.

He said people organizing volunteers to join foreign military forces should face sentences of up to 12 years' imprisonment, while the sentence for volunteers or mercenaries should be up to five years.

One volunteer, Milutin Malisic, earlier said that the group had arrived in Crimea on the invitation of Russian fighters - and they wished to repay the Russians for their support for Serbia in the Balkan wars of the 1990s.

The Crimea, located on the northern coast of the Black Sea, is currently the subject of a stand-off between Russia and Ukraine, which accuses Russia of occupying the region.

Most locals in Crimea are ethnic Russians, and many say it was wrong of the former Soviet authorities to transfer Crimea from Russia to Ukraine in 1954.

**The Balkans Watch Ukraine, But See Themselves (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, by Gojko Veselinovic and Ivana Bilic, 6 March 2014)**

BANJA LUKA, Bosnia-Herzegovina -- International news rarely makes an impact in the Balkans, which has spent the past two decades immersed in its own roiling headlines of war, recovery, poverty, and resentment.

But that has changed with the unfolding crisis in Ukraine, whose complicated struggle for multiethnic balance and postimperial autonomy from Russia strikes all too close to home.

In every corner of the Balkans, from newly independent Kosovo to politically torpid Bosnia-Herzegovina, people are watching events in Ukraine from their personal vantage point as survivors, or victims, of the Yugoslav collapse. Some applaud Euromaidan for taking down a corrupt regime, others lament the potential economic fallout. But no one's opinion seems indivisible from their own experience.

In Banja Luka, the capital of Bosnia's Serb-majority Republika Srpska -- which has frequently threatened secession in favor of joining Serbia proper -- many residents are eager to defend Russia's military buildup in Crimea, saying the territory's ethnic Russians risk retribution from Ukraine's new pro-Western government.

"It's obvious that the new authorities in Ukraine...don't respect the human rights of minorities,"

"It's obvious that the new authorities in Ukraine, who have been promoted by the street, don't respect the human rights of minorities," says Dane Cankovic, a 52-year-old mining engineer. "They removed Russian as an official language, and they view Russians in Ukraine as second-class citizens. Russia is a serious country, and it won't let this happen."

A distinctly different view can be heard to the south in Sarajevo, the devastated focal point of the 1992-95 Bosnian War, which left an estimated 100,000 people dead and more than 2.2 million displaced as Belgrade fought to reverse the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Residents in the Bosnian capital inevitably draw parallels between Russia's moves on Crimea and the incursion of ethnic Serbian soldiers in unmarked uniforms seeking to "protect" fellow Serbs in a city that had long been home to a cosmopolitan blend of Bosnian Muslims, Catholic Croats, Orthodox Serbs, Jews, and others.

Muhamed Hadji-Isakovic, standing alongside gravestones dotting a grassy hillside park in the city center, says he's not surprised by the Russian actions. "It's just another example of Russian policy, something that hasn't changed in all the time we've known Russia," he says. "What did they do in Georgia? What did they do in Chechnya? There's nothing different about their actions. And Europe is weak. I don't know anyone in [Ukraine], but I do support people who are forced to defend themselves."

Frustration with Europe, and the West overall, is tangible throughout the Balkans, but nowhere more so than in Bosnia.

The country's Byzantine political structure of layered government entities -- ethnically balanced but almost incapable of coordinated action -- is a bitter legacy of the international community's Dayton agreement, which has left the country mired in corruption, unemployment, and political inertia.

Mounting public frustration has fueled a wave of violent protests in recent weeks, with many Bosnians looking admiringly to Kyiv's Maidan demonstrators as an example of change from within. Change from outside, warns Sarajevo resident Nadja Mehinovic with the weary voice of someone who knows, is something best avoided. "[Ukraine] should let people themselves come to an agreement -- without the kind of interference by the international community that we had, she says. "We can see that there are a lot of factions there -- extremists and normal people alike."

Belgrade Balancing Act

So far, Serbia has been the only country where the Ukrainian situation has sparked actual street protests. On March 3, 200 pro-Russia demonstrators gathered in the capital, Belgrade, chanting and holding placards reading, "Crimea is Russia, and Kosovo is Serbia."

On an official level, however, Belgrade has sought to maintain a far more subtle balancing act. As a fellow Orthodox country with urgent economic needs, Serbia has long served as Russia's Balkan foothold. Moscow backed Serbian opposition to Kosovo independence in 2008; in return, Russia has poured billions of dollars into Serbia's crumbling energy sector -- a lever it may seek to apply if Serbia, which this year began EU membership talks, moves to solidify its ties with Brussels.

Caught in a Ukraine-like squeeze between Russia and the EU, Serbia has attempted to present itself as a stable, if not entirely neutral, partner to both sides.

Speaking at a March 3 rally in Sremska Mitrovica, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic said that "work and discipline" would lead the day in his country, adding, "We are not going to have a Ukraine or Bosnia in Serbia." At the same meeting, however, he noted Serbia would not break off its ties with Russia, "regardless of what is happening in the world."

Echoes Of 1999

Indeed, many Serbs and Montenegrins, still mourning Belgrade's loss of influence following the collapse of Yugoslavia, harbor tacit sympathies with Moscow as it seeks to restore its Soviet-era status as the imperial center of power. (The similarity has led some commentators, including Ian Traynor in "The Guardian," to compare Vladimir Putin's tactics in Crimea to those of late Yugoslav strongman Slobodan Milosevic in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo.)

"Unfortunately, Ukraine is following the Yugoslav scenario, and I'm sorry about that," Serbian film director Emir Kusturica told ITAR-TASS. "I see the same kind of catastrophe. I think that Russia should protect the Russians who live in Ukraine."

Many in Serbia and Montenegro, which remained a single entity throughout the Balkan wars, have been hotly defensive of Russia's claim on Crimea. They accuse the West -- and particularly the United States, which forced Belgrade's retreat from Kosovo, and an end to the Balkan wars, with 1999 NATO air strikes -- of applying a double standard.

Ivan Milosevic, a journalist in the Montenegrin capital of Podgorica, says he is shocked by NATO's concern that Russia invaded Crimea without permission from the UN Security Council. "I can't believe the hypocrisy. Nobody asked the Security Council for permission to attack us [in 1999]. But now that Russia is doing it, suddenly permission is required," he says. "I think this is a game for the big powers -- we as small nations aren't able to do anything about it."

Democracy 'Moving Eastward'

Others see Russia's goals in Ukraine with more skepticism. Blagoja Grahovac, a retired Montenegrin general and security analyst, says Moscow may be able to claim short-term victory if Crimea declares independence or allies itself with Russia. But, ultimately, the strategy will fail. "The process of democratization is moving eastward, and it's unstoppable. It engulfed Ukraine, and it will engulf Russia, too," he says. "And all of this, which Russia now considers a great triumph, will cost them dearly later. Because there will be upheaval in Russia too, for social and democratic reasons."

In Kosovo, ethnic Albanian residents may feel a certain kinship with Crimean Tatars as fellow native minorities historically oppressed by Slavs. But in Pristina, most public displays of support have been for Ukraine's Euromaidan protesters, who Kosovars see as fighting for their rightful place in Europe.

"The lives of our protesters in earlier years weren't lost in vain -- they brought us freedom," said activist Ramadan Iljazi during a vigil on March 3 for the nearly 100 people killed in the Ukrainian violence. "In the same way, the Ukrainian nation is on the right path, and justice will triumph there as well. We understand the people of Ukraine and what it means to fight for freedom against a strong opponent."

**Sovereignty vs. Self-Rule: Crimea Reignites Battle (*New York Times*, by Peter Baker, 8 March 2014)**

WASHINGTON — They wanted to break away from a country they considered hostile. The central government cried foul, calling it a violation of international law. But with the help of a powerful foreign military, they succeeded in severing ties.

The Kosovars’ secession from Serbia in 1999 drove a deep wedge between the United States and Russia that soured relations for years. Washington supported Kosovo’s bid for independence, culminating in 2008, while Moscow saw it as an infringement of Serbia’s sovereignty.

Now 15 years later, the former Cold War rivals again find themselves at odds, but this time they have effectively switched sides: Russia loudly proclaims Crimea’s right to break off from Ukraine while the United States calls it illegitimate. The showdown in Ukraine has revived a centuries-old debate over the right of self-determination versus the territorial integrity of nation-states.

The clash in Crimea is hardly an exact parallel of the Kosovo episode, especially with Russian troops occupying the peninsula as it calls a March 16 referendum to dissolve ties with Ukraine and rejoin Russia. Though the United States intervened militarily in Kosovo, it did not do so to take the territory for itself. But the current case underscores once again that for all of the articulation of grand principles, the acceptability of regions breaking away often depends on the circumstances.

On Saturday, Tatar women in Crimea protested war as an army convoy passed. Credit Sergey Ponomarev for The New York Times Consider the different American views of recent bids for independence.

Chechnya? No.

East Timor? Yes.

Abkhazia? No.

South Sudan? Yes.

Palestine? It’s complicated.

It is an acutely delicate subject in the West, where Britain wants to keep Scotland and Spain wants to keep Catalonia. The United States, after all, was born in revolution, breaking away from London without consent of the national government — something that the Obama administration insists Crimea must have. The young American union later fought a civil war to keep the South from breaking away. Even today, there is occasional fringe talk of secession in Texas.

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“No state has been consistent in its application of this,” said Samuel Charap, a Russia specialist at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. During a trip he took to Moscow last week, Mr. Charap said, Kosovo was the precedent cited repeatedly by Russians defending the Crimea intervention. “It’s like, ‘You guys do the same thing. You’re no better. You’re no different.’ ”

Russian officials have likewise cited Scotland, which will soon vote on whether to remain in the United Kingdom, as another example. But American officials note that no foreign power sent troops into Edinburgh to replace its local government and stage a vote days later under the barrel of a gun. The Kremlin, they argue, is trying to legitimize an invasion and a land grab with false comparisons to situations like Kosovo.

“It’s apples and oranges,” said Benjamin J. Rhodes, President Obama’s deputy national security adviser. “You can’t ignore the context that this is taking place days after the violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. It’s not a permissive environment for people to make up their own minds.”

While the concept of state sovereignty can be traced to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the issue has been especially tricky for American presidents in the quarter century since the end of the Cold War. Ukraine itself is the product of a breakup, that of the Soviet Union, when 15 separate nations emerged from the wreckage. Several of those new nations then confronted their own separatist movements, notably Chechnya in Russia; Transnistria in Moldova; Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia; and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan.

Although Woodrow Wilson championed self-determination after World War I, the United States like most powers generally prefers stability and the status quo, so it has largely supported preserving borders where they are. During the first Russian war in Chechnya, Bill Clinton even likened Boris N. Yeltsin to Abraham Lincoln, a comparison many in Washington came to regret amid the carpet bombing of Grozny, the Chechen capital.

“Self-determination has been a controversial doctrine since Wilson, and hell to apply,” said Stephen Sestanovich, a former ambassador at large to the Soviet states and the author of a new book, “Maximalist,” on American foreign policy. “One consistent point: It can’t be used as a cudgel by big states to break up their neighbors. Russia’s own record here does not entitle it to the benefit of the doubt.”

Russia’s two ferocious wars in Chechnya since the 1990s were fought to prevent the very strain of separatism it now encourages in Crimea. In backing President Bashar al-Assad of Syria in his civil war against rebels, Russia argues that state sovereignty should not be violated, an argument it has turned on its head in Ukraine.

Of course, the fractiousness that has chopped up the Soviet empire into increasingly smaller and often dysfunctional pieces is not relegated only to that part of the world, although in the West in recent years it has played through political and legal processes rather than military ones.

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A visual survey of the ongoing dispute, including satellite images of Russian naval positions and maps showing political, cultural and economic factors in the crisis.

In September, for example, Scotland will hold a referendum on secession, a vote being held with the acquiescence of London. In November, Catalonia plans its own vote on independence from Spain, although in that case the Madrid government has called it illegal. Quebec held unsuccessful referendums on independence from Canada in 1980 and 1995 and as recently as last week its separatist government was discussing whether another should be held.

But Kosovo is the case that deeply divided Europe. After Yugoslavia fell apart, the Kosovo Liberation Army, a rebel group representing the Albanian minority, struggled against the Serbian government, which responded with punishing force until Mr. Clinton intervened in 1999 with a 78-day NATO bombing campaign.

Kosovo declared independence in 2008. The United States under George W. Bush recognized it, as did Britain, France and Germany, but Russia adamantly rejected it, as did Spain. The International Court of Justice later ruled that Kosovo’s declaration was legal.

“We never saw it as setting a precedent, but there were some nations that saw it that way and still do,” said James W. Pardew, who was Mr. Clinton’s special representative for the Balkans.

John B. Bellinger III, who was the top lawyer at the State Department under Bush, said: “We were very careful to emphasize that Kosovo was a unique situation. We were fond of saying it was sui generis — and it did not create a precedent that would likely be replicable anywhere else.”

That is not how the Kremlin sees it. Ever since, Russia has cited Kosovo to justify support for pro-Moscow separatist republics in places like Georgia, where it went to war in 2008 and recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia over Western objections.

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“Kosovo is very much a legitimate precedent,” said Dimitri K. Simes, president of the Center for the National Interest, a Washington research organization, agreeing with Moscow’s argument. “Independence was accomplished despite strong opposition by a legitimate, democratic and basically Western-oriented government of Serbia.” By contrast, he said, the new pro-Western government in Kiev “lacks legitimacy,” since it came to power by toppling a democratically elected president.

The Obama administration maintains that the cases cannot be compared. Serbia, White House officials said, lost its legitimacy and right to rule in Kosovo by its violent crackdown. Despite Russian claims, there has been little, if any, independent evidence of such a campaign against the Russian-speaking population in Crimea.

“There’s no repression or crimes against humanity that the government in Kiev has committed against the people of Crimea,” Mr. Rhodes said. “There’s no loss of legitimacy.”

**U.S. Hypocrisy on Crimean Secession Move: Washington Supported Breakup of Sudan and Yugoslavia (*TruthDig*, by Juan Cole, 8 March 2014)**

Russia has arranged for its supporters in the Crimean state parliament to vote to secede from Ukraine and join Russia, and has announced that there will be a popular referendum on the issue in the semi-autonomous province, which has been part of Ukraine since the 1950s and went with Ukraine when that former soviet socialist republic became an independent country in 1991.

It is not clear if Russia’s supporters in Crimea are serious about this accession to Russia or if they are just playing a bargaining chip intended to wring long term concessions from the interim Ukrainian government, such as a permanent lease of naval facilities in Crimea to the Russian navy.

While a Crimean secession from Ukraine is unwise and will cause a lot of trouble, it isn’t unprecedented in the last few decades and the US and the West have supported some secessions or country break-ups when they suited their interests, while opposing others.

The US supported the secession of Kosovo from Serbia in the late 1990s (both had been part of the Yugoslav federation in the Cold War, but it fell apart in the 1990s; Serbia’s claims on parts of Bosnia and on all of Kosovo as the main Yugoslav successor state were rejected by the US, which helped Bosnia and Kosovo secede.)

Slovakia seceded from Czechoslovakia in 1993, although that was a more amicable split than the Kosovo secession or the Crimean one, if it happens. Still, Slovaks voted to secede, and no one stood in their way.

The US was positively delirious about the break-up of Sudan and the creation of South Sudan 2011. (Forces in the US congress see the break-up and weakening of Arab Muslim states as a good thing). The wisdom of that secession is questionable, since South Sudan has promptly become a failed state and is now having a civil war. The violence down there was always blamed on Khartoum, but apparently there are social formations and economic conditions in the south that just aren’t conducive to order.

While the US was ruling Iraq, Joe Biden and other US politicians tried to break it up into a Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite state. No one said that a Kurdish secession would be contrary to international law.

Jane Harman when in Congress proposed breaking up Iran into ethnically based provinces. She left that body over a scandal involving Israeli intelligence.

Lots of Irish-Americans would be perfectly happy to see Northern Ireland secede from the United Kingdom and join Ireland. Boston donated money for terrorist actions against London in the 1980s in hopes of making that happen. Rep. Peter King (R-NY) was at that time an open supporter of IRA violence. Official US policy was more even-handed. (I’m not taking a position on N. Ireland; just sayin’). In 1998 George Mitchell negotiated a settlement between the UK and Ireland on Northern Ireland, which recognized Ireland’s legitimate interests in the north.

Mitchell’s careful agreement, in fact, would be a good model for keeping Crimea in Ukraine while recognizing Russian interests there.

But those pundits (and President Obama himself) who are suggesting that a Crimean secession from Ukraine would be contrary to international law or unprecedented, or that the US would always oppose such a thing, haven’t been paying attention. The US position on secessions depends on whether Washington likes the country affected. And Washington itself toyed with partitioning Iraq while it was a colonial possession.

**Ukraine: the next Bosnia? (*The Australian*, by Walter Zaryckyj, 11 March 2014)**

A CRITICAL issue for the G20 chairman in the drama unfolding in Ukraine is to decide whether Ukraine is a strategic linchpin or the next Bosnia.

First, without question, Ukraine is a global pivot point. It is the gateway to Europe, eternally on guard against moves from the east, whether the north (historically Muscovy), the centre (historically the Mongols) or the south (historically the Ottomans).

Second, the country is not naturally a Bosnia. Any serious review of reports from Ukraine since its independence in 1991 indicates that the one thing it has not suffered is ethnic violence. Third, precisely because Ukraine is a strategic linchpin, it could find itself transformed into a Bosnia artificially. Such an induced change might just fit the strategic purposes of a party needing Ukraine to pivot in its direction.

Finally, if such a transformation occurred — if Ukraine did become the new Bosnia — it would be more difficult to manage than the original; the repercussions for Europe and the world would be far greater.

One can advance three rock solid lines of argument about whether Ukraine is indeed a strategic linchpin: the geopolitical, the geo-economic and the geo-cultural. The geopolitical argument was best expressed more than a decade ago by an astute senior staff member on the US House of Representatives international affairs committee who said that members had been discussing the benefits of NAFTA-EU-Ukraine as a triangle.

Instead, he said, “We might want to consider its opposite to really understand what is at stake. Imagine a Ukraine-Russia-China triangle; Ukraine rockets to Russia. Ukrainian wheat to China. Ukrainian assistance to various rogue states and entities, who then could blame China and Russia for some unimaginable ‘tragedy’ that could immeasurably weaken the West.”

The geo-economic argument is easily answered. When asked to name the five countries vital to feeding the world in this century, a top Wall Street expert named five: Argentina, Australia, Canada, the US and Ukraine. As for the geo-cultural argument, anyone remotely acquainted with the work the EU has done with the six member states of its Eastern Partnership initiative (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) will swear that Ukraine is the key to EP’s central role finally making Europe “whole, free and at peace”.

Could Ukraine be the “next Bosnia”? Students of the region would swear Ukraine does not contain any border areas that exhibit the kind of age-old ethnic animosities one might find among the ­country’s neighbours — no Karabakhs, no Transdniesters, no South Ossetias or Abkhazias and for that matter no Chechnyas and Dagestans.

For a time in the early 1990s, US intelligence service saw Crimea as a potential frozen conflict zone but eventually discovered that a three-way ethnic split on the peninsula (the Ukrainians, the Tatars and ethnic Russians) would always lead to a classic Mexican standoff.

From the moment of Vladimir Putin’s ascension to power in 2000, with his self-proclaimed mandate to restore “the greatness of Russia” and right the wrong of the “collapse of the USSR”, and equally from the time of Bill Clinton’s historic speech in 2000 in Kiev promoting Ukraine as a potential “strategic partner” for the US in particular and for the Euro-Atlantic community in general, a jostling by the two sides for Ukraine’s ­attention began in earnest.

The West concentrated on the masses and talked about promoting genuine democracy or the rule of law, installing a mature market economy, enhancing general and energy security, increasing social-ethnic cohesion and creating an established yet tolerant national identity. Putin talked about managed democracy, the joys of kleptocracy, security and energy “interdependence”, the strength of Russian-Ukrainian brotherhood and the benefits of a Eurasian identity.

The Ukrainian masses bought into one side, the UA elites bought into the other and a set of tussles ensued. By February 24-25, this year a firm decision had resulted. The masses managed to pull over the elites to their side or put in place a new elite beholden to them, and gave a definite nod to the West.

Recognising, indeed probably anticipating, that such an outcome was possible, Putin had one great “secret” play left. While the Ukrainian nation might want to head West, the West would be reluctant to accept such a pivot if the country had problems with its neighbours or national minorities. So that very same problem instantly appeared. Crimea was suddenly the poster child for ethnic unrest. And Donetsk, Luhansk, possibly other eastern provinces were right behind.

Wasn’t Ukraine looking exactly like “the next Bosnia”?

But if Ukraine were to remain a Bosnia, albeit an artificial one, it would be harder to contain as a crisis point than was the original Bosnia.

If the animosity Putin created with his intrusion into the internal affairs of Ukraine were to turn into a general Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the struggle would be protracted and messy. That in turn, would cause a refugee catastrophe for Europe of unimaginable proportions. Both such results might open out the issue of “Sudeten Russians” in a number of neighbouring countries including those that belong to NATO.

A final postscript: Putin’s clever Crimean move has shredded the “territorial integrity” notion on which the UN Charter is based. So, what now?

*Walter Zaryckyj is executive director of the Centre for UK-Ukrainian Relations. This is an edited text of a speech he is delivering tonight at the Sydney Institute.*

**Suspect arrested in arson of presidential building in BiH (*Xinhua*, 8 March 2014)**

SARAJEVO -- Police of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) on Saturday arrested a suspect in arson of the presidential building in Sarajevo during the violent protest in February.

The suspect, Salem Hatiboivc, was believed to deliver with his car the gasoline used to set fire on the Presidential Building on Feb. 7, local media reported.

Another person was arrested in connection with the arson on Friday, and police vowed to continue to identify those responsible for the arson.

Police used video clips and other sources to identify those participating in the riots on Feb. 7, when protesters and police clashed violently on in Sarajevo, with over 200 injured and the presidential building set on fire.

The protests, triggered by factory closures, began on Feb. 5 in Tuzla, northeast of BiH and quickly spread to other cities.

Protests have since continued, though with smaller numbers. On Friday, special police officers barred the protesters to enter the main roads in a bid to avoid traffic chaos.

**Bosnian leader: 'Protests reveal immediate amendment' (*Anadolu Agency*, 7 March 2014)**

*Bosniak and Bosnian Croat top officials hold a meeting in the capital, Sarajevo, saying protests reveal change in the social, economic and political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina*

SARAJEVO, Bosnia and Herzegovina -- Bakir Izetbegovic, the Bosniak representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina`s tripartite presidency, met with President of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) Dragan Covic, Bosnian Grand Muftiate Husein Kavazovic and Bosnian Cardinal Vinko Puljic to evaluate the protests in the country.

Izetbegovic said the protests reveal that the social, economic and political situation in the country should be immediately amended after the meeting, which took place at the state presidency office on Friday.

There should be more effort to solve the unemployment issue in Bosnia and good-relations among people should be boosted, said Izetbegovic.

Protests erupted across the country on February 7 as a response to the rising unemployment after state-owned factories were sold to private companies in Tuzla.

Croatian President Covic underscored the number of people who are not pleased with the socio-economic situation is more than that of those who attend the protests.

Noting that relations between Bosnians and Croatians should be better, Covic said different ethnicities in the country should not pose a threat to one another.

**Bosnia Turmoil and EU: Economics, Politics and Disillusion (*Voice of Russia*, by Kells Hetherington, 7 March 2014)**

WASHINGTON -- The political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has “without question destroyed the economic situation,” according to Sheherazade Reham, Director of the European Union Research Center at The George Washington University.

“They have got pretty much nothing happening right now,” she said. “There is very little money going into the Bosnian economy right now. Things are pretty much at a standstill with the riots that are going on in the streets”

Joining the European Union is probably the best thing Bosnia could possibly do from a political standpoint and most certainly from an economic standpoint. And “We are not talking about joining the Euro Zone. We are just talking about joining the European Union,” Reham, also a professor of International Business and International Affairs at GW said.

At some point the political situation probably still erupts, but at least in the interim you have got some degree of economic prosperity, she reasoned.

“The Europeans and the American shave tried, but with no success to get the Bosnians to adopt some sort of constitution, but the economy is always neglected … [because] We are so stuck in this whole political debate about Bosnia that we don’t address some of the economic issues.”

Membership in the E.U. would bring some political stability, Reham added, but it has not happened because of all the infighting that goes on and understands that the EU’s application to join requires a stable political system and a full-fledged democracy.

There are also monies to be had. “Now it might not be private capital flowing in all of the sudden, but Bosnia was most certainly eligible to have regional development funds from the European Union.”

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