** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Friday, 14 March 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**Vulin: No negotiating on Kosovo army (*Tanjug*)**

Outgoing Minister Serbian Minister in charge of Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar **Vulin** has stated that the Kosovo army is absolutely unacceptable for Serbia and that it doesn’t intend to negotiate on this issue within the Brussels dialogue or in some other way. “Wrong are the interpretations that we are requesting some annex, we are not requesting any sort of annex of the Brussels agreement. We are not requesting negotiations on the Kosovo army – there is no army of Kosovo,” Vulin told ***Tanjug***. He said the Serbian Government didn’t give up the request for a session of the UN Security Council on this issue, but it doesn’t depend on it when this will happen. The Serbian Government didn’t change the stand that the Kosovo army is absolutely unacceptable, because Belgrade firmly adheres to Resolution 1244 and according to this resolution it is not possible to transform security forces into armed.

**Foundation for the Union (*Novosti*)**

The Union of Serb Municipalities in northern Kosovo and Metohija will be constituted in the following month, regardless of the opposition and obstruction from Pristina. The first step has already been made – four municipal assemblies adopted their statutes on Wednesday evening. After a marathon eight-hour session in Kosovska Mitrovica, the statute was adopted “one minute before midnight” and the two-third majority was ensured thanks to the vote of the councilor from the Bosniak party, while Albanian councilors voted against. ***Novosti*** learns that the Management Team should send next week the draft statute of the Union of Serb Municipalities to the councilors. They will file their remarks to the draft, after which it will be adopted and the Union will be formed. Prisitna has already stated that the content of the statute is unacceptable for them and requests that the text be amended. The north says this will not happen. “Pristina is bothered by the fact that the word “republic” in not mentioned in the text. We found a compromise solution for the stamp, which states “Kosovo in accordance with UN SC Resolution 1244” then the name of the municipalities with the coat of arms in the middle,” Kosovska Mitrovica Mayor Goran **Rakic** tells Novosti. Edita **Tahiri** said that Pristina would consider the local self-governments illegal “if the municipalities do not harmonize statutes with the Kosovo constitution and laws.” Rakic responds that Pristina can’t influence the work of the assemblies since they are independent organs. The president of the provisional organ of the Kosovska Mitrovica municipality Aleksandar **Spiric** tells ***Novosti*** that the statutes of municipalities from the north are identical when it comes to status neutrality: “Resolution 1244 is the only legal document that binds us.” Spiric explains that the statute of Kosovska Mitrovica also defines cadastral zones of northern Mitrovica that include the village of Suvi Do with the hamlets of Gornji (Upper) and Donji (lower) Suvi Do.

**First round of Serbia-Croatia dispute ends in The Hague (*RTS*)**

The presentation of the Serbian legal team has brought to end the first round of the hearing in the dispute between Serbia and Croatia before the International Court of Justice, on the mutual lawsuits for genocide in the territory of Croatia between 1991 and 1995. This week the Serbian team has presented the counter-suit, which described the mass crimes and genocide of the Serbs committed by the official Croatian armed forces under the guidance of then state leadership, headed by Franjo **Tudjman**. The Serbian side has stated that Serbia did not want to be involved with the case before the Hague court, and sought other mechanisms, but the Croatian side was insisting on the trial. The debate that started on 3 March will be concluded on 1 April, following the second round of argument presentation that will commence on 20 March.

**State Department: Serbian Army committed to promoting peace (*Tanjug*)**

Serbia has clearly demonstrated its commitment to promoting peace and security by training its armed forces to participate in the international peacekeeping missions, reads the U.S. Department of State website. The U.S. supports Serbia's efforts to implement this important mission through the global peacekeeping operation initiative, reads the report by the U.S. Department of State issued following a visit by Serbian Defense Minister Nebojsa **Rodic** to Washington. The Serbian authorities and heads of the military have focused on the peacekeeping operations and training over the last few years. Serbia's participation in the multinational peacekeeping operations and achieving the status of the leader in the region in military training within the UN peacekeeping operation department have made it possible to the Serbian Armed Forces to show their neighbors that they are taking concrete steps with a view to further development and contribution to the regional and international stability, reads the release.

**A Hat-trick in the First Half (*NIN*, by Slobodan Ikonic)**

*Kosovo in the shadow of the Serbian elections*

Northern Kosovo Serb leader Oliver **Ivanovic** had to go on a hunger strike for seven days, to become weak and lose ten kilograms, before the EULEX-led trial chamber would decide to transfer him from detention in Pristina to the detention unit in Mitrovica. Until this happened, there was no use in warning that his life in the Pristina prison was threatened, even though this was also demonstrated during an attempt by him to take a walk after 40 days spent in the detention cell, nor was there any use in the guarantees of the Serbian Government that Ivanovic, and another four arrested Kosovo Serbs, will be available to the judicial organs so they can be released pending trial. Or, perhaps precisely because of those guarantees, the interim provincial authorities in Pristina showed that the state of Serbia doesn’t have either jurisdiction or authority in the province of Kosovo. While an election campaign is underway in Serbia in which, except for a very few exceptions, the mentioning of the province of Kosovo is avoided, the Kosovo Albanian authorities, with the silent assistance of EULEX, are obstructing the Brussels agreement in order to stress, and strengthen as much as possible, the self-styled statehood of the province of Kosovo, a factor that Serbia doesn’t recognize as a state, but with which Belgrade is nonetheless negotiating.

This could also be seen during the friendly football match between the province of Kosovo and Haiti, which FIFA allowed, but without Kosovo’s so-called ‘state’ symbols, and with players jerseys containing the asterisks related to the footnote, and under the additional condition that it doesn’t play with representatives of the former Yugoslavia. The players, who, despite FIFA warnings, had the Kosovo coat of arms on their chests, were welcomed on the field by Kosovo President Atifete **Jahjaga**, Prime Miniter Hashim **Thaqi** and Minister of Sport and Culture Memli **Krasniqi**. The match ended without goals, but the duel was marked with a series of Albanian nationalist incidents. The Kosovo Albanian fans set on fire the flag of Serbia, and during the match the fans of the local team insulted the Serbian nation and state.

If the match was a well-used marketing act, the announcement of the renaming of the so-called ‘Kosovo Security Forces’ into a self-declared ‘Kosovo Army’ is seen as endangering the broader security image of the Balkans. Even though military experts remind that Kosovo is not a UN Member State, and thus doesn’t have the right to its own army, they unambiguously point out that “there is no dilemma that Pristina will work with full steam to its separatist armed forces on the territory of Serbia.”

Brussels explains that NATO supports ‘Kosovo Security Forces’ “within their original mission and mandate, but doesn’t decide on their structure, mandate and mission, because this is under the jurisdiction of domestic institutions.” Still, nearly all Serbs in the province of Kosovo and Metohija are certain that Brussels and NATO are standing behind the “Kosovo Army” and that Hashim Thaqi does nothing before he receives a green light from the EU and NATO headquarters. Even Minister of the Kosovo Security Forces Agim **Ceku** said the announcement of renaming of the force into the ‘Kosovo Army’ had been conducted in coordination with NATO and strategic partners.

Pristina has been announcing that the new armed force in the Balkans, which is created with NATO’s blessing, will have 5,000 members, with 3,000 reservists behind their backs. This army might not be a significant factor, even though, for example, it is larger than the Montenegrin Army, if analysts were not warning about the agreement on military cooperation between Pristina and Tirana, which implies the ability to deploy the army of one onto the territory of the other. Since that agreement was signed by one NATO member country with a non-state actor that is not a UN Member State, the NATO Alliance has, in a way, recognized the separatist Kosovo as a state. For analysts, such as General Momir **Stojanovic**, this is not a big military threat, as much as it is an indication of finalizing a ‘Greater Albania.’

Despite Belgrade’s claims that any ‘Kosovo Army’ which may eventually be formed would not enter Serbian northern Kosovo, since this has been allegedly promised by KFOR, it is unknown whether this is also with written guarantees, thus Serbia decided to seek a session of the UN Security Council over the announcement of the formation of a ‘Kosovo Army’ and the deterioration of the security-political situation in the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija. If it weren’t for the ongoing election campaign, this initiative would sound much emptier, since Serbia accepted four years ago to replace much of UNMIK with EULEX.

And how EULEX behaves one could see during the recent intrusion, without any announcement and clear reason, of Thaqi’s special ROSU police units into the building of the Basic Court in Kosovska Mitrovica with headquarters in Strpce, which operates within the Serbian judicial system, and the seizure of documentation from that judicial institution. ***Radio Gracanica*** reported that four members of the Kosovo police, and one official of the Serbian National Parks Service, were arrested. All of those arrested were Kosovo Serbs. The ROSU special police also intruded into several other Serbian state institutions in Strpce. The Municipality of Strpce is located in the Sirinicka Zupa, numerically and spatially the most compact majority Serb-majority region south of the Ibar River.

Following the announcement of the President of the Higher Court in Kosovska Mitrovica Nikola **Kabasic**, regarding the operation of ROSU special police, that EULEX “was obliged to protect Serbian courts based on the Brussels agreement, taking into account the fact that EULEX has been monitoring the work of Serbian courts in Kosovo over the past six months,” Irina **Gudeljevic**, EULEX spokesperson, responded that “EULEX’s role is only the implementation of the reached agreements between the mentioned sides” and that “all questions regarding the dialogue should be sent to the sides involved in the dialogue, i.e. to Belgrade and Pristina or Brussels.”

The Kosovo government has, until recently, opposed EULEX staying in the province. Following the announcement that a special ad hoc tribunal for crimes committed by the KLA will be formed, the provisional Kosovo provincial government has withdrawn the request for ending the mandate of the EULEX mission in Kosovo, and has accepted the extension of its mandate, but on condition that the tribunal be a special department in the Kosovo Supreme Court that would be composed of international judges.

In the meantime, in the shadow of the elections in Serbia, and with the silent agreement of Western international factors, the arrests, maltreatment,beating of Kosovo Serbs, the obstruction of the campaign for the elections in Serbia followed.

Election rallies in the province of Kosovo were only held by outgoing First Deputy PM Aleksandar **Vucic’s** SNS in Leposavic and by the Serbian Radical Party in North Kosovska Mitrovica and Strpce, while in the latter, their activists were arrested. Pristina prevented, through the use of force, i.e., Kosovo police, the freedom of movement to enter the province by the leader of the Democratic Party of Serbia Vojislav **Kostunica** and this party’s vice president Slobodan **Samardzic**, so they were forced to hold the election rally at the Jarinje integrated administrative boundary line crossing. Entrance to the province was also denied to the leader of the Patriotic Front Borislav **Pelevic**, because of which he is on a hunger and thirst strike in order to show, as he put it, to the Serbian public what are the negative consequences for Serbians of the Brussels dialogue agreements.

It is interesting that the Kosovo Serb-led Independent Liberal Party (SLS) that is in coalition with Hashim Thaqi’s PDK in the interim Kosovo provincial government, called on its sympathizers and members to vote for the coalition gathered around SNS and Vucic on 16 March. According to the leader of SLS, Slobodan **Petrovic**, “his party recognized in the people gathered around the coalition headed by SNS as the bearers of the policy that coincides with SLS’ policy and that is based on ideas of EU integration and the Brussels agreement, as well as the new approach towards the Kosovo reality.”

The decision of official Belgrade to give up on the stand “both Kosovo and the EU,” and to opt for “EU at any cost,” has significantly contributed to giving even more elements of its statehood to the self-declared separatist Kosovo.

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**Dodik: Moscow says no Dayton 2 (*RTRS*)**

The Republika Srpska (RS) President Milorad Dodik said that Moscow has been very principled in its position that there can be no Dayton 2. “At sessions of the UN Security Council, whenever there was discussion of B&H, the Ambassador of the Russian Federation always respected the positions of the RS. Prior to any report from the High Representative to B&H Valentin **Inzko**, which were full of falsehoods, we wrote our reports which the Russian Ambassador presented as facts and spoke of the real situation,” Dodik told ***Radio TV Republika Srpska***. He said that one can best see from the example of the Dayton Agreement that Russia is principled in its support of international law. He said that Russia was not the country which supported and allowed the political violence of High Representatives to B&H. “It was clear from talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey **Lavrov** that Russia remains witness to the Dayton accords and a guarantor of way in which it can be changed, it being only through agreement in B&H, and in no way by intervention from outside,” Dodik said. Dodik said that Russia remains an important ally and that the RS does not want to abandon this alliance. Dodik said that the EU must play a constructive role in B&H, support the functioning of the system and not violence in the streets of the FB&H, which certain EU officials supported, stressing that they could hardly wait for that to happen in B&H. “Our position is clear when it comes to EU integration. It primarily means the resolution of the *Sejdic-Finci* issue and the issue of a coordination mechanism. The RS has absolutely clear and precise positions, and we do not intend to change them,” he said. According to him, the European Commission will be able to define a new policy towards B&H only after the elections in May, namely, after a new European Parliament is formed, which is expected to happen in November. “If Europe wants this area to progress more quickly towards integration, then it will have to turn B&H’s road to the EU into a two-speed road. The RS can go faster and we are stopped on this road. If they want to have this area as a partner in the EU, then they must give us the advantage,” Dodik said.

**Distribution of competencies stopped IPA programs (*Srna*)**

The Republika Srpska Prime Minister Zeljka **Cvijanovic** said that there are a number of projects which were not implemented, projects that should have been implemented through IPA program, since no consideration was given to the distribution of constitutional competencies. “After four, five projects, I said what the common denominator of all problems we identified was. In each of these projects, the situation was tied to the fact that the constitutional competencies of the participants from the RS were not respected, as weren’t those of other government levels, including the Cantons, which were not adequately represented,” Cvijanovic told reporters in Sarajevo after a meeting of a joint EU-B&H task force for accelerating projects financed by the EU. Regarding the funds lost, Cvijanovic said that 600 million Euros were available in the past few years, that 200 million were not used and that the projects agreed were withdrawn. The RS Prime Minister said that, unfortunately, there are concrete things that could have been offered to citizens when it comes to developmental and infrastructural projects which remained blocked. According to her, the participants of the meeting are on the right path to find a solution for some of these projects soon since the participants in them are identified. According to her, this meeting of the EU- B&H task force for accelerating projects is a turning point since the EU representatives understood that we must deal with practical matters. She said that the programming of projects for future aid will be done on sector principles, which is completely different from the IPA of the past five to six years. The meeting was also attended by FB&H Prime Minister Nermin **Niksic**, the Chairman of the B&H Council of Ministers Vjekoslav **Bevanda**, the Director-General of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Enlargement Christian **Danielsson**, and the Director of the B&H European Integration Directorate Nevenka **Savic**. The EU Delegation to B&H announced earlier that projects worth 210 million Euros are being implemented in B&H, and that projects worth additional 150 million Euros need to be agreed.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**PREVIEW-Milosevic-era minister shakes off dark past on path to power in Serbia (*Reuters*, by Matt Robinson and Jaksa Scekic, 13 March 2014)**

BELGRADE - When state television captured Serbia's deputy prime minister wading into snowdrifts this winter to rescue a boy from a stranded car, it was one dramatic act too far for some sceptical Serbs.

Photo-shopped pictures of Aleksandar Vucic - dressed in superman underpants and cape, head superimposed onto the bulging green body of the Incredible Hulk, bare-chested astride a horse à la Vladimir Putin - went viral.

As with all good jokes, there was an element of truth. After 18 months in government, the leader of Serbia's dominant party has inspired the kind of idolatry, and amassed the kind of power, not matched since the late strongman Slobodan Milosevic.

The face of a government crusade against crime and corruption, Vucic is expected to lead his centre-right Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) to a resounding victory in a snap election on Sunday. Barring major upsets, he will become prime minister, with the task of overhauling Serbia's ailing economy.

The SNS is polling at more than 40 percent support. That's at least three times more than its closest rival, the opposition Democratic Party, and the kind of domination unseen since Serbia came in from the cold with Milosevic's overthrow in 2000.

If all goes to plan, Vucic's four-year mandate would take Serbia, the most populous country to emerge from the ashes of federal Yugoslavia, to within a few years of membership of the European Union. The irony is not lost on his detractors.

Until 2008, Vucic was a disciple of the "Greater Serbia" ideology that fuelled the wars of Yugoslavia's demise in the 1990s and left Serbia isolated and bankrupt.

He is haunted by YouTube, where in TV clips he rails against the West and heaps praise on genocide suspect Ratko Mladic, the accused architect of Europe's worst mass killing since the Nazis when his Bosnian Serb forces massacred 8,000 Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica in 1995.

Vucic broke with the ultranationalist Serbian Radical Party in 2008 and converted to the goal of EU integration as Serbia's best hope of recovery and prosperity.

Critics say the U-turn was motivated by little more than expediency, recognition that the ultranationalism of the 1990s was redundant in peacetime. Some are nervous of Vucic's power and popularity, in a country with an affinity for strongmen.

"Vucic has a firm hand, which obviously Serbs feel they need," said Marko Blagojevic of Belgrade-based pollster Centre for Free Elections and Democracy. "The situation is such that people are looking for authority."

MISTAKES

The Serbian media have become increasingly cowed. Vucic served as information minister in the late 1990s when newspapers were fined or closed under tough legislation designed to muzzle dissent as Milosevic led Serbia into war with NATO over Kosovo.

"His slogan is 'Everyone for reforms', but until recently he was crying 'Everyone in uniform'," Democratic Party member Milivoj Vrebalov said on Wednesday, alluding to Vucic's sabre-rattling past. The Democrats, who came to power after Milosevic fell, have split in two since being shunted from office in 2012.

Vucic, a 44-year-old law graduate who worked in a London corner shop while learning English as a teenage student, readily admits he has made mistakes.

"But," he told a rally in the southern mainly Muslim town of Novi Pazar, "smart people learn something through life, and those who are not smart can live three lives and learn nothing."

Adopting the public manner of a well-groomed Western politician, Vucic has won over many of his harshest critics with his energy and apparent effectiveness in government.

His lead role in a much-publicised fight against crime and corruption, including the arrest and trial of influential Balkan retail tycoon Miroslav Miskovic, has increased his popularity.

But the outgoing coalition government he was part of since mid-2012 failed to produce the kind of far-reaching structural reforms that the International Monetary Fund says are needed to stabilise Serbia's shaky finances.

A bigger share of power would allow the SNS to jettison the likes of the Socialist Party of Prime Minister Ivica Dacic, which is hostile to pension reform, public sector pay cuts and steps to liberalise the labour market.

Serbia is wooing the IMF for a new precautionary loan deal, for which it will have to commit to cutting a budget deficit set at 4.6 percent of output for the year and stabilise public debt of more than 60 percent.

Serbian doctors have already protested over pay, and more such complaints may follow. Vucic says he won't be swayed.

"We can't spend more than we have," he told Serbian daily Vecernje Novosti. "Either we're going to pursue a realistic and rational policy, or we'll simply keep lying to ourselves."

**Serbia’s Vucic Poised to Lead Cabinet With EU, IMF Vows (*Bloomberg*, by Gordana Filipovic and Misha Savic, 14 March 2014)**

Serb Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic will probably grab the premiership in March 16 elections with promises to turn the faltering economy around and lead the nation into the European Union by 2020.

Vucic’s Progressive Party, which forced a ballot two years earlier than scheduled, leads the campaign with popular support of 44.6 percent, compared with 13.8 percent for Premier Ivica Dacic’s Socialist Party, according to a March 10-11 poll by Belgrade-based Faktor Plus. The survey has a margin of error of 3 percentage points.

Vucic, who said in 1995 that his country would kill 100 Muslims for every Serb who died, wants to return to parliament with a majority of lawmakers behind him. He is pledging to embrace painful austerity measures endorsed by the International Monetary Fund and embark on talks to make Serbia the third former Yugoslav republic to join the EU two decades after the bloody Balkan civil wars.

“We won’t have power, we won’t be able to implement reforms, we won’t be able to do anything for the citizens of Serbia unless we get 50 percent of votes,” Vucic said at a Belgrade campaign rally on March 11.

Polling stations will open across the country of 7.2 million people at 7 a.m. and close at 8 p.m., with preliminary results expected later in the evening. Final official election results will be announced by March 20, according to the Election Commission.

**Milosevic Association**

Vucic, once a prominent member of the Radical Party led by Vojislav Seselj, who is now awaiting a Hague verdict on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, is trying to shake off associations with his past relations with former strongman Slobodan Milosevic and his cronies.

He supports membership in the EU, a turnaround from the years when he and political allies resisted EU demands to give up suspected war criminals, renounce claims on Kosovo, a former province that declared independence, and bring the judiciary into line with EU norms.

Yields on the 2021 dollar bond rose 3 basis points, or 0.03 percentage point, to 5.57 percent by 9:56 a.m. in Belgrade, data compiled by Bloomberg show.

The election is a “battle for junior coalition partners” to join Vucic in his plan to overhaul the economy and narrow the fiscal gap, Dragoslav Velickovic and Benoit Anne, analysts at Societe Generale SA in Belgrade and London, said in a March 14 note. While their “baseline scenario is bullish for Serbia,” the only question remains about “the pace of reforms, as ideological differences are fading.”

Riding a wave of a growing western-leaning electorate would give Vucic’s party the strongest lock on power by a single party since the communist days, critics point out. The Progressive Party’s founder is President Tomislav Nikolic, while a senior party official, Jorgovanka Tabakovic, is the central bank governor.

**Transparency Ranking**

Supporters also say Vucic is committed to fighting corruption that has left Serbia behind all its ex-Yugoslav partners and neighboring EU members Romania and Hungary in Berlin-based Transparency International’s 2013 corruption perception rankings.

Dragoljub Jovicevic, a 54-year-old lawyer from Belgrade, said he is casting his vote for Vucic and the Progressives because they will be “decisive” in dealing with rampant graft.

“First things first,” Jovicevic said as he sipped coffee at a Coffee Factory overlooking Belgrade’s St. Sava cathedral. “I know corruption won’t disappear overnight, but someone needs to start doing that or we’re doomed.”

While Vucic has promised to form a cabinet with broad support to tackle unpopular measures, “we are more likely to end up with a narrow coalition,” said Naz Masraff, an analyst at political-risk assessor Eurasia Group in London, in a March 4 note. Vucic has yet to prove his commitment to reform is genuine, Masraff said.

**Needs Proof**

The Progressives have “talked the talk of economic reforms” but “done little to walk the walk,” Masraff said.

Serbia’s new government will inherit an economy that the central bank expects to grow 1 percent this year. It will need to further narrow the fiscal gap and cut public debt by 2016 to meet commitments to the IMF, which suspended a loan in 2012.

Vucic has promised billions of dollars worth of investments from the United Arab Emirates over the past year to create jobs in an economy which has the same number of active workers and pensioners and where one in four is out of work.

The government needs to focus on pension-system and labor-market reforms, an overhaul of failing state-owned enterprises and the cleanup of public finances, said Otilia Dhand, an analyst at political risk evaluator Teneo Intelligence, said in a March 10 note on Serbia.

“The main challenge for the new government will be to overhaul and kick-start Serbia’s ailing economy,” Dhand said.

**Serbian paramilitaries join pro-Russian forces in Crimea (*Reuters*, by Aleksandar Vasovic, 14 March 2014)**

BAKCHISARAY, Ukraine - Bearded men in camouflage uniforms and black fur hats and armed with knives, were checking traffic on Thursday along the busy road linking Crimea's regional capital of Simferopol and the naval port of Sevastopol.

A black flag with a skull, the standard of Serbian nationalists, and a Serbian national flag fluttered in the wind alongside the Russian tricolor, bringing back images from the turbulent events of the 1990s in the Balkans.

Bratislav Zivkovic, one of the commanders of Serbia's Chetnik movement, an ultranationalist group with roots in another era, said it was only natural for them to come to Crimea to help their Russian brethren.

Crimea, part of independent post-Soviet Ukraine since 1991, has been in the grip of the Russian military for a week. Its local assembly has declared that the region wants to become part of Russia, subject to a referendum scheduled for Sunday.

Zivkovic's group of five activists have been tasked with manning patrols alongside Cossacks, most of whom have journeyed to the peninsula from Russia in anticipation of the referendum.

"Our motive was to offer moral support to the Russian people of the Crimea and their right for a referendum and nothing more than that," said Zivkovic. "Through the centuries, Russians were helping us, they were giving us support, even now in Kosovo, so we came here to support them."

Russia is Serbia's traditional ally as the two nations share the same Slav origins, Orthodox Christian faith and similar languages. Serbia is also heavily dependent on Russia's energy and the cash-strapped government in Belgrade has turned to Kremlin to underpin its budget.

The Serbian Chetniks draw their name and traditions from insurgents who fought Ottoman Turks in 19th and early 20th centuries. They gained notoriety in the 1990s, when their units committed atrocities against non-Serbs in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, a former Serbian province dominated by ethnic Albanians which won independence in 2008.

Roadblocks were erected along key roads in Crimea last week when men in green uniforms, bearing no national insignia, appeared outside Ukrainian bases, taking control of naval and military installations in the peninsula.

SERBS, COSSACKS ON PATROL

The checkpoint manned by Zivkovic's men was also controlled by masked men in camouflage fatigues armed with shotguns, who described themselves as Cossacks. A group of policemen in Ukrainian uniforms, all carrying machine guns, stood aside, ceding control to the Serbian volunteers and Cossacks.

Zivkovic said his men were willing to fight to ensure the peninsula's ethnic Russian majority won the right to secede and join Russia. But they were there, he said, to prevent violence.

"Every possible incident that might occur will be extinguished swiftly," he said. "We are hoping that even if it comes to fighting and armed conflict, it will be very short, because the population is Russian and the peninsula is Russian."

As the queue of cars and trucks approaching the checkpoint lengthened, one middle-aged truck driver, who identified himself only as Oleg, said he was gratified by Serbian solidarity.

"This is great. They are helping the guys," he said. "This is how it should be. We have to help each other."

Others were angry.

"Who are they helping? I don't understand that. I don't need any help, no one is bothering me here," said Denis, a driver from Simferopol.

"The (Serbs) are occupiers, genuine occupiers. I have no other names for them," said Asan, another driver.

**EU ready to help Bosnia speed up reforms - Ashton (*World Bulletin*, 14 March 2014)**

Ashton, talking to political leaders and activists, said the EU would help Bosnian leaders address protesters' demands to curb corruption and boost the economy, without going into detail

The European Union is ready to expand its engagement in Bosnia to help it speed up the economic and social reforms demanded during mass protests last month, EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton said on Wednesday.

The Balkan country saw the worst bout of civil unrest since its 1992-95 war, as protests over unemployment, corruption and political inertia toppled four of 10 regional governments in one of Bosnia's two autonomous regions.

At the same time, drawn-out talks with the EU on a constitutional reform that would remove discrimination against minorities and let Bosnia apply for the membership of the bloc, collapsed amid political wrangling.

EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule has said the talks will not continue, and announced a new EU approach to Bosnia that would tackle economic and social rather than political challenges.

Ashton, talking to political leaders and activists, said the EU would help Bosnian leaders address protesters' demands to curb corruption and boost the economy, without going into detail on what form that assistance might take.

"We are ready to consider broader engagement with you to help address these issues," Ashton told a news conference. "This is not about lowering the bar, it's about helping you get over it," she said.

"So to fulfil these justified expectations, the leaders need to look beyond ethnic divisions, and look after the interests of all the people," Ashton said. "I call on political leaders to listen, to take responsibility and act. And to do this now."

Bosnia, divided along ethnic lines after the war, has seen reforms and progress towards the European Union blocked by bickering between rival groups.

Bosnia's Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosniaks have opposing visions of their joint state. While Bosniaks aspire to a more centralised state, the Croats want their own entity like the Serbs, who say they have little need for Bosnia at all.

**Bosnian Security Minister Axed Over Violence (*BIRN*, by Elvira M. Jukic, 14 March 2014)**

Bosnia's state parliament has sacked Fahrudin Radoncic as the country's Security Minister for not preventing violence in street protests last month.

The House of Representatives, one of two chambers in Bosnia's parliament, dismissed Radoncic as Security Minister on the request of the Party of Democratic Action, SDA, which said he did not do all he could have done to prevent violence in protests in February.

In the February 7 unrest, several institutional buildings were set on fire in four towns, including cantonal and state-level institutions, such as the Bosnian Presidency and Archives.

Both Bosniak and Serbian parties backed the minister's dismissal. Bosnian Croat MPs and Radoncic's own party, the Alliance for a Better Future, SBB, voted against the move.

Radoncic said he was not to blame for the violence, as maintaining public peace and order lay in the jurisdiction of Bosnia's two entities and the cantons inside the Federation entity.

Radoncic said the Security Ministry lacked hard information on February 7 on what was happening in the streets.

“Unfortunately, the law says the police coordination directorate does not have an obligation to inform us,” Radondic said. “The Prime Minister and Federation Police Department do not have an obligation to inform us either, nor was I, as minister, allowed to ask what were they doing.”

He said the crisis over the escalation of the demonstrations was just one example of how police structures are not functioning together - and the issue of jurisdiction among the police agencies was not new, and had to be solved.

Radoncic said his dismissal had nothing to do with responsibility for the protests but was a matter of trade-off between the president of the Social Democratic Party, SDP, Zlatko Lagumdzija and Milorad Dodik, president of the Alliance of Independence Social Democrats, SNSD.

**Macedonia Gears Up for Double Elections (*BIRN*, by Sinisa Jakov Marusic, 14 March 2014)**

The double elections in April, the priciest in Macedonia’s history, will be secured by some 7,000 specially trained police - and be monitored by hundreds of local and foreign observers.

As the country gears up for the start of two election campaigns later this month, for both general and presidential elections, Macedonia's institutions say they are ready for the nationwide operation.

The Police Ministry this week launched a special training programme for more than 7,000 officers who will be tasked with securing more than 2,000 polling stations during the two rounds of voting.

The training is crucial as it will help the police officers to adopt the rules and regulations contained in the new electoral code, Police Minister Gordana Jankulovska said during the promotion of the training.

“The police has improved its performance during the past election cycles,” Jankulovska maintained, adding that she expected “free, fair and democratic” elections in April.

Apart from several thousand domestic election monitors, the OSCE/ODIHR this week launched its own monitoring mission, with 20 long-term observers who will monitor the entire campaign as well as 300 short-term observers who will be present during the voting.

“Our work here will be to monitor and inform rather than interfere,” Gerth Arens, the head of the OSCE/ODIHR election monitoring mission to Macedonia, explained.

In April, Macedonians will choose both a new head of state and 123 MPs in parliament. The general elections are considered the more important of the two, as they will determine who will hold the most powerful post in the country, that of Prime Minister.

On April 13, Macedonia will vote for a new President. The second round, pitting the two best ranked candidates against each other, will take place two weeks later, on April 27, alongside the snap general election.

The State Electoral Commission, DIK, this week set the price tag for the elections at about 8 million euro, which makes them the priciest in two decades of multi-party history.

However, the DIK says that holding elections in tandem “will still save the country some 3 million euro”, since, if both elections were held separately, they would have cost a total of over 11 million euro.

More than 1.7 million people are eligible to vote in the third early general election in a row since the main ruling centre-right VMRO DPMNE party of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski took power in 2006.

**Montenegro Opposition Demand NATO Referendum (*BIRN*, by Dusica Tomovic, 13 March 2014)**

The head of the opposition Democratic Front says a decision to join NATO will only be acceptable if it follows a referendum.

Miodrag Lekic, leader of the Democratic Front, on Wednesday said the opposition bloc will seek a referendum on joining NATO if the government pushes ahead with membership without seeking people's consent.

"The outcome of a referendum will be acceptable to all members of the Democratic Front," the opposition leader assured.

Most parties in the Democratic Front firmly oppose membership of NATO with the exception of the Movement for Changes, PZP.

Lekic said the government's bid to push the country into membership of NATO risked "turnning one Montenegro against other".

According to Lekic, the issue of Euro-Atlantic integration is a secondary issue compared to the collapse of the economy, the wider political and institutional crisis and the problem of corruption.

Montenegro is currently conducting its fourth annual plan within the Membership Action Plan, MAP, which is regarded as a final step before joining the alliance.

Public support for NATO membership remains relatively low and NATO officials have urged the government to try to increase levels of support.

The government has said it intends to engage in "increased political activity to win greater public support for NATO membership".

Meanwhile, the government also expects the country to receive an invitation to join NATO at the alliance's summit in Wales, in the UK, in September.

The opposition insists that Montenegro will not receive an invitation to join the Western alliance because of its failure to reform the security services.

NATO has not yet specified whether the issue of enlargement will be on the agenda of the summit in Wales.

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