** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Monday, 17 March 2014**

**STORIES FROM LOCAL PRESS**

* **RIK: Counted votes from 99.08 percent of polling stations (*FoNet*)**
* **Nikolic: Vucic – next prime minister (*Tanjug*)**
* **Kirby: Voters showed they expected economic reforms (*Tanjug*)**
* **Chepurin: New government to do what is best for Serbia (*Tanjug*)**
* **One decade since the pogrom of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija (*Tanjug*)**
* **Vulin banned from attending memorial service to murdered Serbs (*Tanjug*)**
* **Management Team opposes formation of Kosovo army (*RTS*)**
* **Krlic on protection of Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija (*Novosti*)**
* **Albanians usurp monastery in Zociste (*Beta*)**

**STORIES FROM REGIONAL PRESS**

* **Sorensen: We want to include B&H in the EU, and we are here to help make that happen (*Oslobodjenje*)**

**RELEVANT ARTICLES FROM INTERNATIONAL MEDIA SOURCES**

* **Serbia's centre-right to tighten grip on power in vote, promising reform (*Reuters*)**
* **Serbia’s Vucic Poised to Lead Cabinet With EU, IMF Vows (*Bloomberg*)**
* **Europe braces for Kremlin reprisals over Ukraine conflict (*The Guardian*)**
* **Promised Land:Serbia and Ukraine, Crimea and Kosovo (*Antiwar*)**

**LOCAL PRESS**

**RIK: Counted votes from 99.08 percent of polling stations (*FoNet*)**

The Republican Electoral Commission (RIK) has announced the preliminary official results based on the processed 99.08 percent of the polling stations at the early parliamentary elections in Serbia. Seven coalitions and parties won seats in the parliament. The list SNS,SDPS, NS, SPO, PS won 1.727.434 votes, i.e. 48.44 oercent and it will have 158 mandates, the list SPS,PUPS,JS won 482.712 votes, i.e. 13.1 percent and it will have 44 mandates, the list DS won 215.923 votes, i.e. 6.03 percent and it will have 19 mandates, while the list NDS, LSV, ZZS, VMDK, ZZV, DLR wone 203.916 votes, i.e. 5.71 percent and it will have 18 mandates, the RIK Director Dragan **Vukmirovic** said. Of the minority parties and coalitions, the following will enter the Serbian parliament: SVM – Istvan Pastor with 75.248 votes, i.e. 2.11 percent and six mandates, PDD – Riza Halimi with 24.274 votes, i.e. 0.68 percent and two mandates, and the SDA Sandzak – Sulejman Ugljanin with 34.015 votes, i.e. 0.95 percent and three mandates. The deadline for submitting reports on possible irregularites expires tonight at 8 p.m. but no irregularities have been reported so far.
Most of the votes in northern Kosovo were given to SNS with 48.41 percent of the 7.173 votes in four municipalities. DSS won 2.846 or 19.21 percent, SPS coalition won 11.97 percent or 1.774 votes, NDS and Dveri have over five percent, while other parties won around or below one percent of the votes.

**Nikolic: Vucic – next prime minister (*Tanjug*)**

Serbian President Tomislav **Nikolic** said on Monday that leader of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) Aleksandar **Vucic** will be the next prime minister, but that he will begin talks with the prime minister-designate after the formation of parliamentary groups in the Serbian parliament and discussions with them. “First, we should complete the elections, then form groups in the Serbian parliament, then talk with all parliamentary groups, although I know with whom I am going to talk about the mandate,” Nikolic told reporters in Kragujevac. Nikolic said that he should discuss the make-up of a new government with those who made it to the parliament, but also those who did not, because they are also citizens of Serbia. According to Nikolic, Serbia will have to resolve the issues that are the consequence of what has accumulated for years. “If everyone solved at least one part, the new government would not be in for so much work,” Nikolic said, noting that is the reason why the new government would not be that popular in the initial period. In relation to that, he said that this would also be difficult time for the SNS.
Nikolic said that the elections passed off in a democratic atmosphere, and that he had expected such election results. “Those who did not achieve a good result should think about the reason for such popularity of the SNS, and whether they contributed to that. The people who set off together with me in the multi-party system, but are now leading unsuccessful parties, should give it a thought,” Nikolic said.

**Kirby: Voters showed they expected economic reforms (*Tanjug*)**

U.S. Ambassador to Serbia Michael **Kirby** has assessed that the voters in Serbia expect the future government to work on the economic reforms and new jobs. Kirby has expressed belief that the new government will continue leading Serbia towards the EU, adding that such course demands the reforms, including the establishing of a functional economy and the continuation of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue.

**Chepurin: New government to do what is best for Serbia (*Tanjug*)**

Russian Ambassador to Serbia Aleksandr **Chepurin** has said he expects the new Serbian Government to do what the country needs, primarily with regards to economic development. Serbia is very close to Russia, and we are on a course that requires economic development, battle against corruption, improved living standard for the citizens, and good mutual relations of Serbia and Russia, Chepurin stated. He has expressed the hope that the new government will act in the interest of Serbia, and emphasized that Russia will attempt to help in the fields that are for the mutual benefit and to preserve the centuries-long friendship of the two countries.

**One decade since the pogrom of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija (*Tanjug*)**

A decade has passed since the pogrom of Serbs in Kosovo, on March 17 and 18, 2004, when 4,012 of them were expelled from the province, and the majority has never gone back. In the surge of violence, 19 people were killed. Some 800 Serb houses were destroyed and 35 religious facilities burnt, including 18 cultural monuments, some of which dating back to the medieval times. One of those was the Church of Holy Mary Ljeviska in Prizren, built between 1306 and 1307, on the remains of 11th century sanctity. The excuse for the pogrom was the campaign of the Albanian media, accusing the local Serbs of having forced a group of Albanian boys to cross the Ibar River, on which occasion one of them drowned. The investigation of the UNMIK police later showed that the accusations were false. The March pogrom is being marked today and tomorrow in Pristina, northern Kosovska Mitrovica and Gracanica. On that occasion, in the church of St Nicolas in Pristina the Raska-Prizren Bishop **Teodosije** has conducted the memorial service, which was supposed to be attended by Minister Aleksandar **Vulin**.

**Vulin banned from attending memorial service to murdered Serbs (*Tanjug*)**

Outgoing Serbian Minister in charge of Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar **Vulin** has been banned from attending the memorial service to the Serbs killed in the pogrom of March 2004 in the church of St Nicolas in Pristina. The latest ban shows that Pristina wants to forbid us to remind the world public of the unpunished Albanian crimes and bestialities against the Serbs, it has been stated by the Office for Kosovo and Metohija. UNMIK and EULEX have been invited to condemn this ban to the visit of the Serbian Minister, and also to do whatever is in their power in order to stop the policy of violence and prohibitions.

**Management Team opposes formation of Kosovo army (*RTS*)**

The Management Team tasked with establishing the Union of Serb municipalities dismissed on Saturday as completely untrue a statement by the SDP Citizen Initiative on support by representatives of the Serb community in Kosovo and Metohija regarding the idea of forming a so-called Kosovo army. The Management Team dismissed allegations in the statement sent from the SDP regarding any participation of Kosovo Serbs in the creation and operations of the so-called Kosovo army. “Representatives of local self-government authorities in Kosovo and Metohija and the members of the steering team remain firmly committed to international law, the UNSCR 1244 and the positions of the Serbian government on all issues related to Kosovo and Metohija,” the statement said. The Management Team also warned of the danger posed by “false statements aimed at introducing chaos and untruths in the media sphere whereby the public is deceived,” said the statement of the Management Team and mayors in northern Kosovo.
Earlier on Saturday, a media statement was released saying that the political representatives of the Serbs in northern Kosovo have pledged support to the government and president of Serbia in their demand that security forces be established in that part of the province. It was noted that the statement had been sent from the official e-mail address of Oliver Ivanovic’s SDP for technical reasons.

**Krlic on protection of Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija (*Novosti*)**

The issue of legal and physical protection of the Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija will be the topic of the Brussels talks between Serbia and the Pristina authorities very soon. Mirko **Krlic**, assistant head in the Office for Kosovo and Metohija in charge of heritage is in Kosovo and Metohija every day, keeping ties with the remaining part of our population there and he is informated about the situation on the ground and preparations for the meeting with the Pristina side in Brussels. ““It is the inalienable right of every country with full sovereignty to be a heir of cultural values that are the fruit of its entire history,” reads the Vancouver UN Declaration in 1976 that regulates the issue of the heritage of nations throughout the world,” Krlic tells ***Novosti***, adding that the state of Serbia will build its stand at the upcoming talks based on these international principles. “We will insist to be directly included in the protection of our heritage in Kosovo and Metohija with the engagement of services and experts. The Serbian Orthodox Church should have “functional ex-territoriality” in at least 40 protected special zones and the Albanian municipal authorities should not be allowed to do anything in these zones. The Church expects guaranteed right to manage its own property and to be excluded from taxes and customs, to be protected from expropriation and to have an important voice during the resolution of all issues in the zones of Velika Hoca and downtown Prizren where some of the oldest monuments of Serbian history are located. Krlic stresses that it is the obvious intention of the Albanian side to place our heritage under their full control. The Serbian side will not allow it. “We expect the EU to propose the formation of the Council for implementing laws on special zones and laws on Velika Hoca and Prizren in which the Serbian Orthodox Church would take part along with the EU, OSCE, and two Kosovo ministries,” says Krlic. The most acceptable thing for the Serbian side would be for the decisions of the Council to be passed through consensus and for it to be an advisory body with the Kosovo government and to have executive role. Specifically, the decisions of the Council would be executive, and the Kosovo ministries (of culture and spatial planning) will be obliged to implement the decisions of the Council passed in this manner.

**Albanians usurp monastery in Zociste (*Beta*)**

The Monastery of Holy Kosmas in Zociste, near Orahovac in southern Kosovo, has stated that an Albanian family has usurped the monastery land, and parallel with the continuation of works on the renovation of that edifice, the verbal provocations towards the monks are continuing. It has been specified that the Shala family from the village of Zociste has plowed and usurped 32 acres of land that belongs to the monastery, for which the church authorities own documents.

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**Sorensen: We want to include B&H in the EU, and we are here to help make that happen (*Oslobodjenje*)**

The Head of the EU Delegation in B&H and the EU Special Representative, Ambassador Peter **Sorensen**, speaking about the EU’s new approach to B&H at the press conference in Sarajevo, said that the EU remains dedicated to what it has done in the country. “What is a fact is that we are staying here, we are remaining dedicated to what we are doing and spreading the circle of our action. In this light, one must consider Catherine **Ashton’s** visit and director Christian **Daniellson’s** visit, and everything that has been done. What we want is for B&H to be included in the EU. What we will do is more than is necessary to do to help this truly come to fruition,” explained Sorensen. Responding to a reporter’s question connected with the dismissal of B&H Minister of Security Fahrudin **Radoncic**, with whom he met, he said that dismissals, of which there have been plenty since he arrived, mean that something is happening. “Democratically elected structures decide who will be and who will not be in government. I have no comment,” explained Sorensen.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Serbia's centre-right to tighten grip on power in vote, promising reform (*Reuters*, 17 March 2014)**

Serbia's centre-right Progressive Party bid to cement its grip on power for the next four years in a snap election on Sunday, promising an economic overhaul of the ex-Yugoslav republic as it embarks on talks to join the European Union.

Opinion polls suggest the party may win more than 40 percent of the vote, a haul unprecedented in the almost 14 years since Serbia came in from the cold with the ouster of strongman Slobodan Milosevic.

Party leader Aleksandar Vucic, a former ultra-nationalist and once feared Milosevic-era cabinet minister who converted to the cause of EU membership in 2008, is likely to become prime minister.

The Progressive Party (SNS) forced the snap election after just 18 months in coalition government, saying it needed a stronger mandate to pursue a much-needed overhaul of the Serbian economy.

The party's domination owes much to Vucic's personal popularity as the face of a popular crusade against crime and corruption that saw Balkan retail tycoon Miroslav Miskovic put on trial. The campaign has struck a chord with many Serbs angry at decades of deep-rooted graft.

Critics, however, are unnerved at the power amassed by a man who up until five years ago was a virulent anti-Western disciple of the Greater Serbia ideology that fuelled the wars of Yugoslavia's bloody demise in the 1990s.

Vucic now says Serbia must follow fellow ex-Yugoslav republics Slovenia and Croatia into the EU, and is advocating root-and-branch reform of Serbia's bloated public sector, pension system and labour legislation.

"I expect reforms, job creation and the fight against corruption to be the main issues for us after the election," Vucic, dressed casually in jeans and a blue sweater, said as he voted shortly after polls opened at 7 a.m. (0600 GMT) among the high-rises of New Belgrade.

The country of 7.3 million people must commit to rein in its budget deficit and public debt in order to secure a new precautionary loan deal with the International Monetary Fund, which could come soon after a new government is formed.

Timothy Ash, head of emerging markets research at Standard Bank, said Serbia had the potential to become an "IMF poster child".

"The political establishment and the population appear ready/primed for reform, and a new strong government with a fresh mandate has no excuse now for not reforming," he said.

KOSOVO SETTLED

The opposition is warning voters against handing too much power to Vucic. He was information minister in the late 1990s when newspapers were fined and shuttered under draconian legislation designed to muzzle dissent as Milosevic led Serbia into war with NATO over Kosovo.

The outgoing government, in which Vucic was deputy prime minister, went a long way to finally putting to rest the issue of Kosovo. It agreed to cede Serbia's last foothold in its former southern province, which declared independence six years ago and has been recognised by more than 100 countries.

In return, the EU granted Serbia membership talks, which formally began in January shortly before the government fell.

The process, likely to run beyond 2020, should help steer reform and lure much-needed foreign investment to the biggest market to emerge from the ashes of Yugoslavia. Serbia is a natural hub for a region with deep linguistic and cultural ties.

"I voted for Vucic because he's doing the right thing," said 68-year-old pensioner Ceda Kerkez after voting in the capital. "He's not in bed with the tycoons, he's arresting the tycoons, and I think there will be more arrests after the election."

Vucic's SNS is expected to bring several other parties into government, possibly to share the blame for what promises to be a painful economic overhaul. The outgoing government ducked most tough economic measures.

Opinion polls say the Socialists of outgoing Prime Minister Ivica Dacic and the Democratic Party of former Belgrade mayor Dragan Djilas will fight it out for second place, still a long way behind the SNS.

"They (SNS) promised much, but did not fulfil any of their promises," said voter Mirjana Jelovic, a 69-year-old retired doctor. "That's why I voted for the Democratic Party."

**Serbia’s Vucic Poised to Lead Cabinet With EU, IMF Vows (*Bloomberg*, by Gordana Filipovic and Misha Savic, 16 March 2014)**

Serbs headed to the polls today in early parliamentary elections designed to install Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic as the head of a government vowing to spur the economy and win European Union membership by 2020.

Vucic’s Progressive Party, which forced a ballot two years earlier than scheduled, leads the campaign with 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 his party to win a full majority in parliament. He now pledges to embrace 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.

“I am sure we will be able to form a government that will be able to continue along our European path faster,” President Tomislav Nikolic, a member of Vucic’s Progressive Party, told reporters after voting in Belgrade. “Things are clear. This is a great chance for Serbia.”

Polling stations across the country of 7.2 million people will 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 has promised billions of dollars worth of investments from the United Arab Emirates to create jobs in an economy which has the same number of active workers and pensioners and where one in four is without a job. EU accession also promises to raise living standards and output per capita, which at 36 percent of the EU’s average, is lower than those of the bloc’s poorest member, Bulgaria, according to Eurostat.

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. Aside from Nikolic in the presidency, senior party official Jorgovanka Tabakovic is the central bank governor.

Vucic’s critics fear a tendency to wield a powerful hand over institutions may give him too much influence in a country that has received criticism from the EU for weak rule of law and selective justice.

“Things are not black and white,” Sonja Licht, an analyst at the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, said today by phone. “A great dominance of a single party in a relatively young democracy like Serbia can be dangerous, since they want to control all segments.”

EU Turnaround

Once a prominent member of the Radical Party led by Vojislav Seselj, who is now awaiting a Hague court verdict on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, Vucic 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.

The elections are “all very much positive for Serbian credit,” Abbas Ameli-Renani, a strategist at Royal Bank of Scotland Group Plc, said by e-mail on March 14. “In my view, all the positive news is already priced at this stage and I don’t expect any further relative tightening of Serbian yields on the back of a positive election outcome.”

Yields on the 2021 dollar bond rose 3 basis points, or 0.03 percentage point, to 5.57 percent by 2:44 p.m. on March 14 in Belgrade, data compiled by Bloomberg show.

Anti-Corruption Drive

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.

“I know corruption won’t disappear overnight,” Jovicevic said, as he sipped coffee at a cafe overlooking Belgrade’s St. Sava cathedral. “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.

Public Debt

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. Serbia’s 2014 budget targets a fiscal deficit of 7.1 percent of gross domestic product. It will need to narrow the gap further and cut public debt by 2016 to meet commitments to the IMF, which suspended a loan in 2012.

The next government needs to focus on fixing its pension system and labor market, overhauling failing state-owned enterprises and cleaning up public finances, unpopular measures that if not done quickly may turn public opinion against it.

“If they start with economic, social and institutional reforms they have a chance to last longer,” Licht said. “If not, the citizens will punish them.”

**Europe braces for Kremlin reprisals over Ukraine conflict (*The Guardian*, by Ian Traynor and Julian Borger, 14 March 2014)**

*EU officials prepare for sanctions against Moscow if it goes ahead with referendum on Crimea, but fears Russian retaliation may lead to trade war and destabilisation in the Balkans*

Europe is bracing itself for painful reprisals from the Kremlin as both sides become locked in an increasingly intransigent conflict over Ukraine and Crimea that many expect to escalate into a ruinous trade war, and further destabilisation in the Balkans.Over the weekend, EU officials and diplomats are to negotiate a blacklist of senior Russian figures to be subjected to visa bans and assets freezes if Moscow, as expected, goes ahead with a secessionist referendum aimed at annexing Ukraine's Black Sea peninsula on Sunday.

The Russians are certain to retaliate against any punitive action, EU officials say, while tightening their grip on part of Ukraine and ignoring western demands to stand down their forces.

"They are not de-escalating, they are consolidating," said a senior European diplomat.

President Vladimir Putin has ample levers to pull in his confrontation with the west, from gas and oil supplies, to mobilising Russia-friendly minorities in other countries, to offering cheap credits to haul neighbouring states into Russia's orbit and away from western integration, to throttling and threatening recalcitrant countries in Russia's backyard through embargoes and closing borders, to sabre-rattling with the Russian military. He can also cause mischief further afield in places where western policy is seen to be drifting and failing, such as Bosnia.

Milorad Dodik, the leader of the Serbian half of Bosnia and a politician committed to sabotaging any single Bosnian state, was in Moscow this week where he was feted as a hero by the Russian Orthodox church leadership. He met foreign minister Sergei Lavrov and had been scheduled to meet Putin, though that meeting was never confirmed.

Western officials in Sarajevo suspect the real aim of the visit was to secure Russian funding in order to be able to wreck a two-year International Monetary Fund standby agreement with Bosnia, conditioned on slimming down the bloated government apparatus in both halves of the country.

In return, Moscow is asking for vocal support for its policy in Crimea, and if the crisis escalates, a possible Serb renunciation of closer ties with Nato and the EU. Russia is also pushing Dodik to participate in Russia's Southstream gas pipeline project in south-east Europe, a project opposed by the west.

"Will they continue to have the standby arrangement with the IMF? Who knows what other options are being explored," said the diplomat in Sarajevo. "Dodik is feeling strong these days. I wouldn't put an ambitious move beyond them if they feel it reinforces their autonomy."

Paddy Ashdown, the Liberal Democrat peer and the international community's former High Representative in Bosnia, warned that Moscow's support for Bosnian Serb separatism could be dangerously destabilising for Europe.

"Given the fragility of Bosnia, to try to draw it into a wider confrontation over Crimea is incredibly irresponsible. Bosnia is not a functioning state but a failed state," said Ashdown, who intends to use a speech in Sarajevo next Tuesday to raise the alarm. "I do not believe the most likely outcome at present is violence, but I can't now discount that outcome."

While Putin is expected to ratchet up the worsening dispute, the Europeans appear committed to expanding the sanctions on Russia into the spheres of trade, finance and energy, moves that will expose EU vulnerability, with tens of billions at stake in commerce, investment and the mutual energy dependence that hinges on EU reliance on Siberian gas piped mainly via Ukraine.

European governments are drawing up contingency plans to try to navigate energy shortfalls within the union, but senior officials and diplomats are warning that eastern Europe, Germany and Italy in particular will have to be able to take the pain dished out by Putin if the policies are to have much impact.

"We can expect tough measures from Putin. He has nothing to lose now," said Michael Leigh, a former senior European Commission official dealing with EU enlargement and policy towards the EU's neighbours. "I would expect him to up the ante. His plans have been laid long in advance."

Depending on what happens in Crimea on Sunday, EU foreign ministers are to announce their blacklist on Monday in Brussels. A summit of EU leaders next Thursday, which will be completely dominated by Ukraine, is then likely to press ahead with the penalties while reserving the "stage 3" option of trade sanctions.

"He has a clear objective," said Leigh, a senior adviser in Brussels to the German Marshall Fund. "It's 19th-century sphere of influence. Without the use of force, if possible."

In Ukraine, say senior EU diplomats, Putin's aim is to disable and paralyse the post-revolutionary government in Kiev. "The Russian strategy now is to create facts on the ground. It's not just Crimea, it's his view of Ukraine. The aim is deliberate balkanisation and weakening," said one.

While Ukraine is the immediate emergency, there is likely to be more trouble in the coming months in parts of the former Soviet Union which the Kremlin eyes proprietorially.

Next door to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova are supposed to sign trade and political pacts with Brussels by the summer, aligning themselves with Europe. A highly vocal pro-Russian minority in Moldova, the Gagauz, which, like Crimea, has an autonomous regional parliament, is already loudly demanding that the government in Chisinau choose Russia over Europe.

"It's a real problem," said Leigh. "The communists are strong, Russian is widely spoken. The simplistic idea of Moldova breaking away [from Russia] won't ever appeal to large parts of the population. And the government in Georgia is also having second thoughts."

It was the same issue – trade and political pacts with Brussels – that triggered the Ukrainian crisis in November. Chastened by the experience and their blunders, EU leaders say they are now racing to seal the deals with Georgia and Moldova.

**Promised Land:Serbia and Ukraine, Crimea and Kosovo (*Antiwar*, by Nebojsa Malic, 15 March 2014)**

On Sunday, March 16, two polls will be held in Eastern Europe. One will be a complete mockery of democracy, resulting in a government determined to trample a country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The other will be a referendum on independence in the Crimea.

The same powers that launched the illegal, illegitimate war of aggression against Serbia in 1999, occupied and in 2008 illegally declared a portion of Serbia an independent state, now howl about "aggression" from Russia and "territorial integrity" of Ukraine. As Justin Raimondo puts it, "Western leaders only bloviate about moral and ‘international law’ when it suits their purposes. Otherwise, when that law is supposed to apply to them, they shrug it off and suddenly it’s might makes right." The hypocrisy ought to be breathtaking, but it’s the normal state of affairs in the West. "All rights for me, and none for thee" is the sum of the New World (Dis)Order.

EUtopia

The official Western explanation for the "peaceful protesters" forcing out an elected government with firebombs and guns is that President Yanukovich was corrupt, and the "people of Ukraine" wanted a future in the EU, which is not corrupt at all. Ahem.

The new government just happens to be headed by the man U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland favored for the post in a conversation leaked in early February. He leads the party whose name translates as "Fatherland." Key security and military positions in the self-proclaimed cabinet are held by brownshirts from the "Freedom" Party and "Right Sector." The first thing the new regime did was abolish the law guaranteeing equal rights to Russian and other languages in the country. But Washington says they are democratic democrats, and all this is Russian propaganda. And Washington never lies, so.

No one has bothered to answer why any Ukrainians would aspire to become vassals of the EU and live like the Greeks. The EU is advertised as being one great Germany, but the stark truth is that only Germany is prospering inside the super-state, while the newer members are seeing their traditional industries smothered by the ever-rising mountain of impossible regulations.

Also going unmentioned is that becoming like Greece would actually be the end result of a long, costly and painful process of "reform." In the meantime, Ukraine would be more like Serbia, the EU’s current model candidate.

And Serbia is a country that is independent and sovereign only in the very loosest sense of either word; where no matter who the people vote for, the government is put together by Brussels and Washington; and the country is run by what can only be described as a quisling cult of EU and Empire sympathizers, fanatically devoted to denying and suppressing all thought there might be an alternative to "Euro-Atlantic integrations."

On Sunday, March 16, such a Serbia will go to the polls in a command performance designed to provide a new majority for the ruling Progressive Party, and bestow legitimacy on the governing coalition’s policies of looting, lawlessness and treason.

Coup to Con

How did Serbia get to be this way?

What it could not accomplish with bombs in 1999, the Empire did in October 2000 through the prototype "color revolution": it toppled a "dictator" in Belgrade who refused to follow orders, and replaced him with a "democrat" who would. When he refused to be a puppet, he was politically sidelined in favor of a "pragmatist go-getter" PM – and when the PM began harboring delusions of independence and refused to be ordered around by the Imperial ambassador, he was shot. By early 2004, a suitable sycophant was installed as president, and in 2008 a coalition government under his leadership was tortured out of electoral results. Then, in 2012, a brazen con job switched out the spent former president and his Democrats for a replacement quisling and the Progressives. The regime’s policy, however, changed not a bit – and in fact became more fanatically servile.

Before they were re-branded as "Progressives" by US political consultants, the current President and "First Deputy Prime Minister" (looking to drop the "First Deputy" bit next week) of Serbia were the leading members of the Serbian Radical Party, long demonized as "hardline ultranationalists." In the 2012 election, they campaigned on a platform of wanting to engage the EU and the Empire, but seeking to protect Serbian sovereignty and interests. Once installed in power, however, the Progs executed a U-turn: Serbian identity, history and interests were declared "baggage of the past," and getting rid of them was necessary for the sake of the bright European future!

The key to this program of identity removal was declaring the NATO rape of Serbia consensual. Giving up Kosovo, you see, is the key condition for (maybe, some day, eventually) joining the EU. So a pact made in Brussels, in April 2013, de facto recognized the statehood of the occupied province (declared independent in 2008) and disavowed the four counties still standing for the Serbian constitutional order. This was treason, yet the West praised it as statesmanship of the highest order.

The much-ballyhooed "fight against corruption" amounted to overhyped drug busts and trumped-up charges against one tycoon who conveniently lacked political protection. The highest court in the country has all but admitted the April 2013 "Brussels Agreement" is neither legal nor constitutional, but gave the government "six months to make it work."

Meanwhile, economic "development" consists of taking out ruinous loans from the IMF and Arab sheikhdoms, while selling off the country’s assets as collateral. What isn’t pawned off is looted outright: in just the first decade following the October 2000 coup, as much as $51 billion has been siphoned out of Serbia into various offshore accounts. There is yet no data as to how much the Progs have contributed to enlarging that sum.

The Actual Kosovo Precedent

Contrary to hysterical pronouncements in the Anglosphere, Russia’s reaction to the Empire openly meddling on its doorstep has been remarkably restrained. How would Washington react if a hostile government were installed in Ottawa by force and fraud? Yet Moscow did not stage a countercoup, or send the tanks into Kiev. Instead, it moved to secure the Crimean peninsula, which was assigned to Ukraine by Nikita Krushchev in 1954. Crimea is home to the Russian Black Sea Fleet, and an overwhelmingly ethnic Russian population.

Imperial propaganda insists that, unlike the case of Kosovo, the separation of Crimea is absolutely different and there can be no comparison. This is a red herring. The only context in which Russia has mentioned Kosovo is the 2010 decision of the International Court of Justice on the legality of independence declarations.

As predicted here at the time, the ICJ’s shameful decision is now coming home to roost. When Serbia challenged the "Kosovian" declaration of independence, the Empire strong-armed the ICJ into ruling that it wasn’t illegal per se. As the dissenting judges pointed out, this involved a "judicial sleight-of-hand" which redefined the ethnic Albanian provisional legislature – operating under specific UN rules – as something else. The Crimean legislature is legal, legitimate and has every right to do whatever it pleases come Monday. And the only "argument" the Empire can offer in dissent is, "because we say so." Come to think of it, that’s precisely all the "argument" it offered in Kosovo.

\* \* \*

***Media summaries are produced for the internal use of the United Nations Office in Belgrade, UNMIK and UNHQ. The contents do not represent anything other than a selection of articles likely to be of interest to a United Nations readership.***