** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Thursday, 20 March 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**Delibasic receives death threats in detention in Pristina (*Politika*)**

The health condition of Dragoljub **Delibasic**, retired colonel of the Serbian Interior Ministry, whose detention was extended by a EULEX until 4 May, is seriously endangered; he receives death threats, and for over 40 days, the time he has spent in the detention unit in Pristina, he took a walk only twice. That is why his attorney Miodrag **Brkljac** filed a request yesterday to the Basic Court in Mitrovica, relocated in Vucitrn, for his transfer to the detention unit in Kosovska Mitrovica, and for an examination by specialists in the Kosovska Mitrovica healthcare center. If the EULEX trial judge doesn’t positively respond to this request in the following week, Delibasic will be forced to go on a hunger strike. Brkljac stresses that Delibasic’s treatment in the detention in Pristina is below any dignity, that the Albanians threatened him during prison walks, cursed him, telling him they would slaughter him: “He is exposed to a kind of lynch, which is counter to the European Convention on human rights, even the Kosovo Law on criminal proceedings.” Brkljac thinks there is no reason not to meet the request for transfer, because Delibasic is in the same legal position as Oliver **Ivanovic** who was transferred to Kosovska Mitrovica. The attorney points out that the criminal offences with which Delibasic and Ivanovic are charged were committed in Kosovska Mitrovica and that they were processed by the public prosecutor and the Basic Court in Mitrovica, so he asks why is Delibasic sitting in detention in Pristina.

**Moskopulos: We still don’t recognize Kosovo (*Novosti*)**

“It is clear – Greece hasn’t changed its stand on non-recognizing Kosovo and at this moment it doesn’t intend to change it. What will be in the future and what will be the circumstances, I don’t know,” the Head of the Greek liaison office in Pristina Dimitris **Moskopolus** told ***Novosti***. He explains that his statement “that Greece will recognize Kosovo in the interest of peace and stability in the region” referred to “how things function” since Greece wants the entire Western Balkan region to join the EU, while clear consequences stem from such a position. “The EU is composed of states that mutually recognize each other. Thus, it is unthinkable and absurd for some country to join the EU if it isn’t recognized by all other members. Therefore, in order for Kosovo to join the EU it would have to be recognized by all countries that are EU members, as well as future ones.” Asked whether the same is true for Serbia, as a country on the membership path, Moskopulos says: “In my opinion, yes. But, this question is not on the agenda now. Both Serbia and Kosovo are yet to join the EU and at this moment we don’t know what kind of circumstances will exist then.”

**Serbian Foreign Ministry: Technical government cannot comment events in Ukraine (*Beta*)**

Serbia doesn’t have a position on the EU sanctions to individuals from the toppled Ukrainian regime, because the government in technical capacity can’t comment the political situation in the world, ***Beta*** was told at the Serbian Foreign Ministry. “The new Serbian Government will take a position on the situation in the Ukraine and Crimea. The technical government doesn’t comment current political events in the world,” the Ministry stated.

**Davenport and Chepurin received by Mrkic (*Politika*)**

Outgoing Serbian Foreign Minister Ivan Mrkic had separate talks on Wednesday with the Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia Michael **Davenport** and Russian Ambassador Aleksandr **Chepurin**, who informed him about the stands of Brussels and Moscow, the Foreign Ministry stated in a release. According to the release, Davenport asked to be received by the Minister in order to convey a message to him from the EU High Representative Catherine **Ashton** related to the latest developments in Ukraine. “Minister Mrkic also conferred with Russian Ambassador Aleksandr Chepurin, who conveyed a message from Russian Foreign Minister Sergey **Lavrov**,” states the release, without specifying the content of the messages.

**Serbian blue helmets departing for Cyprus (*Politika*)**

A farewell party has been organized in Vranje to the Serbian Army members joining the UN multinational operation in Cyprus. The new 43-member team will replace their colleagues from the Serbian Army. Commander of the Army Land Forces Aleksandar **Zivkovic** stated that by participating in peace operations, the Serbian Army members confirm Serbia’s interest and intention to contribute to peace and security in the world. This is the 6th team of the Land Forces members that have been engaged in Cyprus since 2011, within the Hungarian-Slovakian contingent. Serbia is also engaged in the UN peace operations in Lebanon, Ivory Coast, Congo, Liberia and the near East, as well as in the EU Mission in Somalia.

**Getting accustomed to independence (*Politika/Novosti*)**

The book by Rade **Brajovic**, longtime journalist and editor of ***Vecernje Novosti***, entitled “Kosovo and Metohija – Getting Accustomed to Independence” (Bombing with Deceptions), was presented at the press center of the Journalists’ Association of Serbia. The publisher is the Belgrade Forum for the World of Equals, an NGO headed by Zivadin **Jovanovic**, former foreign minister. The “3N” formula (Navikavanje Na Nezavisnost), explains Rade Brajovic, means “no” to mighty world bullies, the U.S. and the EU, and their NATO pact, and of course to Pristina and their western obedient and separatist regime, plunderers of Serbian Kosovo and Metohija. “3N” also means denial of internal political and other forces in Serbia, some parties and organizations, non-governmental and everyone’s – in short, to all those closing their eyes before the violators of the basic principles of world politics and international justice, but also to violators of basic human values. “3N” also means opposing a wicked concept – getting accustomed to independence of Kosovo. “Lately, top Serbian government officials’ statements have become almost identical to the statements made by U.S., EU and NATO officials – that it is necessary to change quickly the consciousness of the people, that it is a condition for a better life, i.e. EU membership,” said Zivadin Jovanovic. He says the book throws a new light on the Kosovo crisis and calls on the Serbian public to stop the imposed silence on this topic. Former ambassador in the United Nations Vladislav Jovanovic says the book of selected articles by Rade Brajovic unveils Serbia’s thirteen-long capitulating policy in view of Kosovo and Metohija. The essence of this dishonorable policy has been from the very beginning, and remained until the end, to move the attention of the public, by way of spinning, from Kosovo to topics of physical survival and, allegedly, Serbia’s miraculous EU membership, which will occur at some point. Author Brajovic said he wished to point to all characteristics of the Kosovo crisis and that, in his opinion, underway is the process of getting the Serbian public accustomed to independence of Kosovo.

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**B&H didn’t join EU statement on situation in Ukraine (*Srna*)**

Member of the B&H Presidency Nebojsa **Radmanovic** has told the Russian Ambassador to B&H Aleksandr **Botsan-Harchenko** that there are different opinions inside the B&H Presidency on the crisis in the Ukraine and that there is a request from the EU for B&H to join the EU statement on the political situation in the Ukraine, but that this didn’t happen. Radmanovic said this didn’t happen because there is no consensus in the B&H Presidency that is necessary in foreign political issues, the B&H Presidency said in a statement. The Russian Ambassador said that, according to the Russian side, all political activities in the Crimea are in adherence with international law, unlike the political actions in the Ukraine that preceded this crisis and similar events in other parts of the world that were in violation with international law principles. Apart from the crisis in the Ukraine, Radmanovic and Botsan-Harchenko also discussed relations between B&H and Russia, and the current political situation in B&H. They noted an increase of Russian investments in B&H over the past years, which contributes, apart from good and friendly bilateral political relations between the two countries, to improving the overall economic cooperation that is on the rise.

**Lagumdzija expects B&H and Serbia to step up cooperation following Serbian elections (*Nezavisne Novine*)**

B&H Foreign Minister Zlatko **Lagumdzija** has said that the big victory of Aleksandar Vucic’s Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) at the early parliamentary elections in Serbia is a great encouragement for the region. Lagumdzija said that Vucic claimed victory insisting on justice and work, and his foreign policy priorities are joining the EU and regional cooperation. He said that Vucic’s statement stressing his intention to deal with the future, rather than the past, is encouraging, as B&H is interested in the future in the EU in the same way as Serbia. “Vucic is trying to bring together many other people, who have lost the elections, despite there being no need for that, which speaks about the political maturity of the policy he pursues,” Lagumdzija said. B&H finds it very important to know that Vucic places unity, integrity and democratic future of B&H, as a country integrated into broader regional and European areas, among Serbia’s priorities, he said. Lagumdzija expects cooperation between B&H and Serbia to intensify first and also that the first joint meeting of the Serbian government and the B&H Council of Ministers, which was postponed because of the Serbian elections, will be held soon.

**U.S. Embassy: B&H Constitution doesn’t give entities the right to secede (*Fena*)**

The stance of the U.S. is well known and remains unchanged: B&H territorial integrity and sovereignty is guaranteed by the Dayton Peace Accord. Neither the Dayton Accord nor the B&H Constitution give any entity the right to secede from B&H. This was confirmed by the U.S. Embassy’s public affairs office to ***Fena*** after a question about the U.S. Embassy’s stance toward drawing parallels such that the referendum in Crimea on joining Russia could eventually serve as a precedent for a referendum on separating the Republika Srpska from B&H. “Rhetorical speculation on secession isn’t useful. Any such activity that would lead to the legal dissolution of B&H would represent a violation of the Dayton Accord,” the public affairs office stressed in a statement.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**RPT-Fitch: Serb Election Suggests Reform Mandate, Opposition Remains (*Reuters*, 19 March 2014)**

The decisive victory by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) in Serbia's parliamentary elections arguably constitutes a mandate to accelerate fiscal consolidation and structural reform in line with SNS's broad policy commitments, Fitch Ratings says. But it remains to be seen how a new government will overcome deep-rooted opposition to reform in areas such as restructuring state-owned enterprises.

SNS leader Aleksander Vucic has reiterated his pro-reform agenda and commitment to EU accession and a renewed IMF agreement. He said on Monday that he expects to pass "key laws, including the labour law, the bankruptcy law, the privatisation law... by the end of June or mid-July," according to news agency reports. Restructuring state-owned enterprises and successful implementation of other structural reforms could speed up economic recovery and narrow external imbalances, supporting Serbia's credit profile.

However, SNS was the largest party in the outgoing coalition government, which made limited progress on consolidation and reform in the face of popular and political opposition. Restructuring and privatising of SOEs has been delayed, for example, while fiscal measures such as wage and pension reform and VAT increases may not fully address the deterioration in public finances. Popular opposition to reform may persist, as voters appear to have responded to SNS's anti-corruption stance as much as its economic programme.

And despite SNS's margin of victory - it won over 48% of the vote and over 150 seats in Sunday's poll, giving it an outright parliamentary majority in the most emphatic result since the introduction of multiparty elections - Vucic has appeared to acknowledge the need for broad political support for reform. He said on Monday he will "extend a hand" to other political parties, with a view to forming a new government by 1 May.

A precautionary lending agreement with the IMF could provide a policy anchor and boost investor confidence, but this will depend on reform and consolidation commitments. Negotiations on EU accession, which began in January, could also help to sustain reform momentum.

The recent signing of a $1bn loan agreement with the United Arab Emirates may help Serbia refinance some of its most expensive debt, but Serbia remains dependent on short-term market borrowing.

We downgraded Serbia to 'B+' from 'BB-' in January to reflect the sovereign's widening budget deficit and growing debt. The Outlook on the rating is Stable.

Concluding an IMF deal, containing inflation and maintaining exchange rate stability as well as structural reform and fiscal consolidation would be credit positive.

**Further ‘Putinization’ Awaits Post-Election Serbia (*BIRN*, by Jelena Milic, 20 March 2014)**

The Progressives’ absolute triumph in the general election, and the lack of any discernible opposition forces, will further strengthen the trend towards authoritarianism.

The Serbian Progressive Party’s absolute victory in the Sunday Serbian elections, when it won 158 of 250 seats in parliament, has created new room and conditions for the further “Putinization” of Serbia.

The main characteristic of this type of regime and form of social order is that power is concentrated in the hands of a few, rather than being distributed among independent institutions divided into the three branches of government.

No attention is paid to the strengthening of institutions or to the formation of a professional state administration.

In such a system, the security system (the police, army, private security sector, intelligence agencies, judiciary, customs service) are all under party or personal control, not under democratic control.

The information coming from this system, as well as the mechanisms illegitimately controlled by party and state structures, give the authorities a chance to deal harshly with all political opponents, economic rivals and any others who dare to criticize them.

In a system where Putinization is in force, economic flows, from the private and the state part of the economy, as well as the armed forces, can quickly and arbitrarily be allocated in the absence of strict procedures such as those in stable democracies. This gives these regimes a short-term comparative advantage in achieving their interests.

As for civil society, in countries treading the path of Putinization, it is dying away and becoming strictly project-oriented.

The media scene is also vanishing. Pro-“state” media and brutal political tabloids are taking over, intimidating the government’s opponents and eliminating these people from public and business life.

The new degree of domination over Serbia of the Progressive Party leader, Aleksandar Vucic, will only strengthen this state of affairs.

Theoretically, even if Vucic genuinely wanted to take Serbia towards the EU, he does not have complete support for this, even in his own party, which is far from monolithic when it comes to key issues such as Kosovo, the EU and Russia.

We should expect many more obstructions of the Brussels Agreement on normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, starting with the series of recent Constitutional Court decisions on some provisions of the Agreement, ruling them unconstitutional.Who is to blame for this situation in Serbia and who bears the responsibility?

The Progressive-Socialist coalition government is the first to blame because it failed to seize the opportunity it got from a combination of circumstances, including the fact that the West saw it as a suitable partner to begin wrapping up the Kosovo story.

To resolve the Kosovo issue the West was prepared to sacrifice quite a bit, even all the good things that Serbia had previously done in the process of building institutions and, in general, in supporting the democratization process. The West lost part of its legitimacy in the eyes of democratic Serbia by legitimizing the Progressives government in advance.

Russia is, of course, also to blame. It articulates its foreign policy interests primarily through its energy policy and the possibility of an easier allocation of financial “assistance”. Serbia’s likely new Prime Minister, Vucic, is already on his way to Moscow.

The current Crimea-Kosovo comparisons being drawn may arouse hope on both sides, resulting in new pressures to fully cease the already sluggish implementation of the Brussels Agreement. It will also encourage such ideas as annexing Northern Kosovo and Republika Srpska to Serbia.

What about the opposition in Serbia? It is hard to say what that is any more. The Democrats, until now the biggest opposition party, have suffered a major blow since Boris Tadic left the party and decided to form a new one – the New Democratic Party.

Tadic also seems to have failed to become an opposition leader. Instead, he is merely a participant in a tender about returning to power, now with Vucic. He should have the responsibility to realize and admit that he was the one who established many Putinization mechanisms in Serbia when he governed from 2008-2012.

Mladjan Dinkic, of the United Regions of Serbia, is a man who has never said a word about any foreign policy challenges.

As for Cedomir Jovanovic, of the Liberal Democratic Party, we justified his egocentrism, clientelism and virtual ownership of his party on the grounds of the party’s standpoints. Yet, Jovanovic formed a pre-election coalition with the misogynistic cleric, Mufti Zukorlic, and Jovanovic has also supported Ukraine’s ousted and discredited leader, Viktor Yanukovych.

There is also a series of rightist parties that spread hate speech, pro-Fascist ideas, homophobia, xenophobia and racism.

In these elections, the Democratic Party of Serbia, DSS, was among the few legitimate opposition parties with a clear policy – Serbia institutionally closer to Russia. However, it failed to pass the election threshold of 5 per cent because the voters recognized Vucic as the man who would do this better and faster. Vucic must be aware of the strong pro-Russia faction assembled around President Tomislav Nikolic in the Progressives and among the staff in the security system.

The true and the only opposition in these elections was the Enough is Enough Movement.

They should be congratulated on the 2 per cent that they won in such a short time, in spite of the Progressives’ demonization of one of their leaders, Sasa Radulovic. We are left to hope that they will transform into a political party and define clear policy proposals for other spheres of life, especially a much clearer foreign policy than the one they had in these elections.

There is still more room, because a large number of people didn’t even vote. We should not expect someone else to do something for us. Either join the existing parties in Serbia and change them from the inside, or set up new ones. Parliamentary democracy is not perfect, but there is still no alternative.

The 50 per cent of those who didn’t vote are certainly responsible for the current state of things in Serbia, and for the direction in which it will head.

**Serbia Opposition Chiefs Resign After Poll Blows (*BIRN*, 20 March 2014)**

Leaders of the Democratic Party of Serbia and the United Regions of Serbia have resigned after their parties failed to cross the threshold to enter parliament for the first time.

Vojislav Kostunica submitted his resignation as president of the Democratic Party of Serbia, DSS, after the party failed to enter parliament following the March 16 general election.

"This is the moment when the party has not entered the Serbian parliament for the first time in its history. It is my duty to resign," Kostunica said on Wednesday.

The DSS won only 4.24 per cent of the votes, thereby failing to pass the 5-per-cent threshold. Kostunica will be replaced by Aleksandar Popovic until the new elections are held in the party.

The leader of the United Regions of Serbia, which also for the first time failed to pass the threshold, also resigned.

Mladjan Dinkic fulfilled a promise given on election night to resign as party president. The party won only 3.04 per cent of the votes.

"I'll see whether I will continue working at the Faculty of Economics, or in music production, that is something I know to do," Dinkic said.

Before he entered politics following the 2000 democratic changes, Dinkic was a teaching assistant at Belgrade University's Faculty of Economics. He has remained active in his band, Monetarni Udar (Monetary Shock).

Dinkic added that his wife would be delighted by his decision to quit politics as he would have more time for family life.

Cedomir Jovanovic, leader of the opposition Liberal Democratic Party, said he did not intend to withdraw from his party although it won only 3.1 per cent of the votes.

"I do not feel responsible [for the defeat] and I am the last person who would resign when things are tough," Jovanovic said.

Jovanovic has been leader of the party ever since it emerged from the Democratic Party in 2005.

**South of Serbia Could Request to Join Kosovo (*Novinite.com*, 19 March 2014)**

Southern parts of Serbia could request to join Kosovo if Crimea is incorporated into Russia.

"If authorities in Moscow demand that Crimea join Russia, Tirana [Albania's capital] and Pristina [Kosovo's capital] should demand the same for Presevo valley," Jonuz Musliu, head of Bujanovac Municipality, was quoted as saying by Serbian radio B92 and CROSS news agency.

Presevo valley, as well as all South Serbian municipalities, Bujanovac, Presevo and Medvedja, are populated mainly by ethnic Albanians, who form a 90% majority.

Musliu claimed that, at a historic level, Presevo valley has always been part of Kosovo.

It was separated from Kosovo's administrative unit in 1948 by the Yugoslav communist leadership.

Misliu also reminded that Presevo's Albanian community had already demanded annexation to Kosovo through a referendum held on May 2, 1992, with support of the move amounting to 98%.

Bujanovac Municipality's head was himself a leader of pro-Albanmian militant group at the time of clashes that took place in Presevo in 1999-2001 as a follow-up to the Kosovo war.

Over the past decade, experts have raised fears that Presevo Valley could become "a second Kosovo" if Serbia, Kosovo and Albania's governments do not find a solution to the conflict.

After signing on Tuesday a decree accepting Ukraine's Crimea into Russia, President Vladimir Putin, though dismissing parallels between Crimea's referendum and Moscow not recognizing Kosovo, cited the will of the peninsula's population as a reason to annex it.

Serbia, which is currently dealing with its political affairs after early elections on Sunday, has made no immediate comments on Musliu's remarks.

**How similar \_ or not \_ are Crimea and Kosovo? (*Associated Press*, by Dusan Stojanovic, 19 March 2014)**

BELGRADE, Serbia — Vladimir Putin's key argument justifying Crimea's secession from Ukraine and annexation by Russia is the West's acceptance of Kosovo's declaration of statehood in 2008.Kosovo and Crimea both sought independence against the wishes of their central governments but the two situations have many differences.With the strong support of the United States, the ethnic Albanian-dominated Kosovo seceded from Serbia over Serbia's strong objections. Russia, a historic Slavic ally of the Serbs, at the time argued that the Kosovo declaration was a serious breach of international law that could lead to a series of statehood claims elsewhere in the world.Enter Crimea, Ukraine's strategic Black Sea peninsula. After Crimean residents voted overwhelmingly Sunday to secede and join Russia, Putin is invoking the precedent of Kosovo to justify the vote while the West insists the ballot is invalid.Here's a look at Crimea and Kosovo:HOW ARE CRIMEA AND KOSOVO SIMILAR?Both Kosovo and Crimea have a majority who belong to an ethnic minority. Just as Kosovo Albanians feared Serbian repression during the autocratic rule of late Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, Russians living in Crimea feared the Ukrainian nationalists who came to power in Kiev in February.Both the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and the ethnic Russians in Crimea voted overwhelmingly in favor of secession, while the Serbian minority in Kosovo and the Ukrainian and Tatar minorities in Crimea mostly boycotted the votes.There was foreign military intervention in both regions with NATO intervening in Kosovo and pro-Russian troops seizing control of Crimea ahead of the vote.WHAT ARE THEIR MAIN DIFFERENCES?NATO intervened in Kosovo in 1999 only after significant evidence of Serbian abuses against ethnic Albanians, including mass killings and deportations. Pro-Russian forces intervened in Crimea with no major abuses or violence reported against ethnic Russians.The West didn't annex Kosovo after driving Milosevic's forces out of the former Serbian province, but sent in peacekeepers. Russian troops, meanwhile, took control of Crimea before its referendum was held.Kosovo declared independence but did not join its ethnic brethren in neighboring Albania in a single state. Crimea, which has a majority Russian population, signed a deal to join Russia two days after its vote.Kosovo declared independence nine years after Serbia lost effective control over its former province and only after a long diplomatic process when it was virtually an independent state. Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine only weeks after the country's pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovych, fled to Russia.WHAT DID THE U.N. COURT SAY ABOUT KOSOVO?In July 2010, U.N.'s highest court ruled that Kosovo's declaration of independence was legal but did not outright endorse Kosovo's claim to statehood.WHAT DID PUTIN SAY?"Our Western partners created the Kosovo precedent with their own hands," Putin said Tuesday when he signed a treaty to incorporate Crimea into Russia. "In a situation absolutely the same as the one in Crimea, they recognized Kosovo's secession from Serbia as legitimate while arguing that no permission from a country's central authority for a unilateral declaration of independence is necessary."WHAT DOES THE WEST THINK ABOUT PUTIN'S ARGUMENTS?Western leaders have rejected Putin's arguments, saying Kosovo was a unique case due to the large number of victims during the 1990s Balkan wars amid the violent breakup of Yugoslavia. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has insisted that analogies between the West's actions in Kosovo and Russia's intervention in Crimea are "shameful.""To make it crystal clear, the situation from that time is in no way comparable to what is happening in Ukraine today," Merkel said. "Russia's actions in Ukraine unequivocally breach basic principles of international law."HOW ARE PUTIN'S REMARKS VIEWED IN SERBIA?Serbian officials — who still refuse to recognize Kosovo's statehood — thought Putin would never make Kosovo a precedent to justify his annexation of Crimea. But they still believe the Russian president will never recognize Kosovo and will continue to block it from becoming a U.N. member state, despite being recognized by some 110 nations."Crimea is yet more proof that things might go out of control when international law is violated," said Borko Stefanovic, a ranking Democratic Party official in Serbia. AP Balkan correspondent Dusan Stojanovic covered the events in Ukraine and Kosovo.

**Bosnia Serb Opposition Unites Against Dodik (*BIRN*, 20 March 2014)**

Three opposition parties in Republika Srpska are forming a broad coalition aimed at challenging the ruling Alliance of Independent Social Democrats led by the entity president, Milorad Dodik.

Three opposition parties in Republika Srpska, one of two entities in Bosnia, on March 19 said they were uniting into one bloc - and would talk to other interested parties prior to the elections.

The People's Democratic Movement NDP, the Party of Democratic Progress PDP and the Serbian Democratic Party, SDS, hope their new formed “Union for Changes” can beat the ruling Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, SNSD, led by Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska, in the elections.

Dragan Cavic of the NDP and Mladen Ivanic of the PDP said on Wednesday in Banja Luka that the coalition would field its own candidates. Ivanic said that the parties would field a joint list for the state parliament but not for the entity.

Mladen Bosic, president of the SDS, said that the opposition parties would together offer broad alternatives to the policies offered by Dodik's SNSD.

Dodik, meanwhile, said the opposition parties only damaged Republika Srpska and that they did not have any capacity to bring about change. He added that they were all made up of recycled and failed politicians.

“In the toughest times for Republika Srpska, Ivanic and Cavic gave away a huge number of [the Serb entity's] jurisdictions," Dodik said.

“They should first change themselves,” he added, referring to opposition calls for change. “Nowadays they have no programme, their politics is just a policy of hatred and divisions - a policy that does not have any concept.”

Ivanic was at one time a Prime Minister of Republika Srpska while Cavic was the president of the entity from 2002 to 2006.

**Bosnia Back on the Brink (*US News*, by Michael Shank and Clint Holmes, 17 March 2014)**

*Ukraine can learn from Bosnia's failed socioeconomic policies*

Ukraine would be wise to take a lesson from Bosnia's economic and political turmoil.

Post Arab-Spring, and now in Eastern Europe, we are witnessing the repercussions of societies that failed to deliver economic stability and growth for their citizens. What started out in many countries in Europe and the Middle East was a desire for the mainstream to have a say in their economic and political futures, but these desires have often been overtaken by more radical forces and movements.

Ukraine is merely the most recent example. The dire economic conditions in Ukraine that mobilized a widespread desire for something better have been co-opted by various interests, from the activities of Ukraine's far right, to Russia trying to solidify and recapture its long time traditional areas of influence and control, to the West positioning itself in semi-Cold-War rhetoric and reaction.

It is helpful to take a lesson from Bosnia lest Ukraine suffer a similar fate. Bosnia’s brutal war, involving the Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks, was “resolved” through the U.S.-sponsored Dayton Accords that subsequently formulated a constitution and governing structure of Bosnia. But this framework has produced little besides rampant corruption, with income inequality at the highest levels Bosnia has ever seen and an unofficial unemployment rate at nearly 60 percent.

[See a collection of editorial cartoons on Vladimir Putin and Russia.]

Much like Ukraine’s proximity to Western Europe contains potential for spillover conflict, so too is Bosnia’s proximity precarious. Bosnia’s economic situation is on the brink of exploding and rival forces – the Russians (through the Serbs) and radical movements (through likely outside sponsorships from Saudi Arabia and beyond) – are looking to extend their sphere of influence into Bosnia. The economic vacuum is being filled by those who react faster and with clear policy and clear targets. Communities who are suffering from economic hardship are increasingly inclined to take anyone’s help, including Russia’s, if there is a promise of a better future.

If either manages to extend their sphere of influence and gain a significant foothold by the Adriatic Sea, the potential for spillover into the rest of the European Union becomes more likely. We could see the emergence of a pro-Russian orthodox block, for instance. Right now, there are Serb Chetniks in the Crimea supporting the Russian moves to incorporate it into its control.

Public opposition may save the day. Demonstrations are on the rise in most of the major cities in Bosnia, with people from every walk of life asking for greater economic opportunity and an end to the rampant corruption. Some cantons have witnessed change but others little. Despite grim economic circumstances, the majority of people have not yet gravitated to more radical forces.

This, of course, could change if the rampant corruption is not addressed. The Serbs could once again, empowered by a resurgent Russia, declare union with Serbia and once again push the Balkans into its second war within a generation.

Not unlike in Ukraine, the potential for continued proxy wars in Bosnia (whether reminiscent of the now-retired Cold War and the so-called Global War on Terror) is apparent.

The way to preempt this potential, however, is not through more aggressive jockeying or military grandstanding, but through basic improvements to the socioeconomic situation of these respective countries.

The benefit of this approach is that it costs virtually nothing. Encouraging a change to a more inclusive and democratic society is vastly cheaper than entering into a new arena of conflict and possibly handing the entire Balkans over to subversive forces keen to gain influence and control.

Bosniaks are ready partners for the West and ultimately want to belong to Europe. But building trust is essential. The first step in that process is for Europe and America to show respect to their country and to homeland Bosnia. Furthermore, some on the ground are suggesting the reestablishment of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the return of the prewar constitution.

Within this political frame, the thinking goes, and with financial help, Bosnia could flourish politically and economically. Nationalist parties would lose momentum and Serbo-Croatian aspirations would lose their grip among minorities inside of Bosnia. After Serbs realized that a greater Serbia was not feasible, they might be more inclined to turn to Europe, especially after witnessing the benefits of increased investment in a Bosnian economy and a privileged status in the American and European markets, all of which the West should use to incentivize more peaceable policies.

All of this is speculation, of course, but the overall message is clear. A military ramp up – whether in Bosnia or Ukraine – won’t help stabilize these countries nor provide safety amid insecurity. The only way forward is to bolster the socioeconomic standing of the majority, all the while ensuring political inclusion of any minority.

Equality, economically and politically, is the surest way towards transitional stability. The painful evidence of the lack of such equality, 20 years on in Bosnia, should send a strong message to Ukraine that this lesson learned must be learnt again.

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