** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Friday, 21 March 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**Ballot boxes watched by Albanians (*Novosti*)**

If the draft law on elections in Kosovo is adopted, internally displaced persons from the province will not be able to vote, Kosovo Serb representatives warn. Even though this regulation was not placed yesterday on the agenda of the Kosovo Assembly session, Serb representatives warn that the draft law is not favorable for several reasons. “Apart from denying the right to displaced persons to vote, i.e. reducing the number of Serbs on the election lists, the composition of municipal electoral commissions and boards would be very bad. There will be only Albanians at these posts, because the proposal is to appoint representatives of only four largest parties in the assembly,” member of the Central Election Commission of Kosovo Nenad **Rikalo** tells ***Novosti***, noting that the peak of cynicism would be for Serb MPs in the Kosovo Assembly to vote for this law. In that case, Albanians would also be chairing election boards in municipalities with a Serb majority. Rikalo warns that the reserved seats in the Kosovo Assembly would be also lost with this draft election law: “Even though there are ten guaranteed seats, the reserved seats for the Serbs are deleted. Such imprecise formulation leaves room for abuse.”

**Serbian Army members highly appreciated in international missions (*Tanjug*)**

Members of the Serbian Army are highly appreciated and significantly contribute to international missions, it was stated at the seminar on modern multinational operations at the Center for Peacekeeping Operations. According to the Chief of the Center for Peace Operations Colonel Milivoje **Pajovic**, the Serbian Army is taking part in eight missions at present – six UN and 2 EU missions, with 214 soldiers. He told ***Tanjug*** that both units and individuals are taking part in missions throughout the world. An infantry troop is participating in the UN Mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL), an infantry platoon is in Cyprus, while military observers and staff officers are in missions in Africa and the Near East. Serbian military-medical teams are taking part in the missions in Congo and Somalia. “The Center for Peacekeeping Operations, the Serbian Army and Defense Ministry are planning to continue in 2014 with the same capacity and number of participants in multinational operations, so that up to 500 Serbian members will be rotated through missions in the course of 2014,” says Colonel Pajovic. He recalls that the Serbian Army continued the tradition of participating in multinational operations on the traditions of the former Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) that has been since 1956 in missions on Mt. Sinai, Namibia, Iran, Iraq and many other countries. “Over the past ten years, we have taken part in peacekeeping operations with more than 2,000 members. That is a major contribution that a state like Serbia can give for participation in UN and EU multinational operations. There is not a single member of the Serbian Army who hasn’t contributed with some new standard in a mission, for which we are praised,” said Colonel Pajovic. Former special representative of the UN Secretary General in Haiti and Western Sahara Julian **Harston** has stated that the peace missions without political measures can’t be successful. “Peace can’t be built only with a military component, without a political strategy. An integrative approach envisages inclusion of all instruments towards fulfilling tasks. Serbia has given its major contribution and it was commended at the UN headquarters for this, so the Serbian army soldiers have the reputation of a quality and professional staff,” said Harston. He said Serbia should continue to contribute to international peace, but stressed it would be good if it insisted on having an envoy at the UN Peacekeeping Operations Department. Advisor at the Serbian Foreign Ministry Milos **Strugar**, former member of the UN Mission in Lebanon, says that Serbian soldiers had demonstrated a high level of professionalism and knowledge in UNIFIL. Traditional peacekeeping operations dealt only with monitoring the cease-fire and had military feature, said Strugar, adding that the focus has been on multidimensional operations over the past two decades. He explained the change occurred over the change in the nature of the conflicts in the world that were conflicts between states up until the 1980s, after which there have been more internal conflicts with consequences on state institutions. The current missions are dealing not only with monitoring cease-fires, but also with protecting civilians, supporting elections, protecting human rights, establishing rule of law, promoting national dialogue. “A peacekeeping operation supports and assists diplomatic efforts in reaching a solution, and cannot be a replacement for a political solution,” stressed Strugar.

**Obradovic: Croatia presented defensive positions (*RTS*)**

The hearing in the dispute between Croatia and Serbia based on mutual genocide suits has continued before the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Head of the Serbian legal team Sasa **Obradovic** stated that Croatia has presented rather defensive positions in regard to number of objections of the Serbian side that will resume presentation of its evidence next Thursday and Friday. Last week, representatives of the Serbian team presented Serbia’s countersuit, which describes mass crimes and genocide against the Serbs that was committed by the Croatian armed forces headed by President Franjo Tudjman. The main evidence of genocidal intent and extermination of Serbs in Croatia are the transcripts of Tudjman’s meeting with the Croatian military leadership in Brioni in 1995, when the operation Storm was planned.

**Shogorov: Break-up of sovereign states started in Kosovo (*RTS*)**

The Head of the Office of the Russian Federation in Pristina Andrei **Shogorov** has stated that the operation of breaking-up sovereign states has started precisely in Serbia and Kosovo and that Russia will never forget what happened at the time. Speaking at the Philosophical Faculty in Kosovska Mitrovica at the presentation of the book by Yelena **Guskova** entitled “Kosovo and Metohija – War and Peace Conditions”, Shogorov added that after this followed the break-up of other states and recalled the events in Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, Egypt and Ukraine.

“Nobody is aware and didn’t understand that Russia has limits for tolerance. Western colleagues crossed this limit,” said Shogorov. “Russia’s stand is principled, it will not change the stand towards Kosovo,” he said.

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**RS and FB&H will not assume non-implementable obligations (*Srna*)**

The Republika Srpska (RS) Prime Minister Zeljka **Cvijanovic** and FB&H Prime Minister Nermin **Niksic** said that they are ready for further talks with the IMF in connection with the stand-by arrangement, while taking care not to assume obligations that are non-implementable. “We discussed the situation in connection with the arrangement with the IMF, where certain problems have occurred, and analyzed prospects for continuation of the arrangement and the phase we are now in,” Cvijanovic told reporters after a meeting with Niksic in Doboj. Cvijanovic reiterated her readiness to continue the talks, which she also stressed a few weeks ago at a meeting with an IMF delegation and Niksic. “We are open for talks, but we are taking care not to assume obligations we know are non-implementable. If there is a realistic approach to all this, then there remains room for talks,” she said. FB&H Prime Minister Nermin Niksic confirmed that “the IMF story” has not closed yet. “However, we do not want to be people who will make promises that are unrealistic, which exceed the bounds of our competency, and we cannot assume obligations for someone else,” Niksic said. He added that the public should get more information about this issue after the talks between the FB&H and RS Prime Ministers and IMF representatives. “What is important for the public at the moment is that the story of the arrangement with the IMF has not closed yet. While not assuming obligations that are not in the competency of the Entities, we will try to meet the obligations that are ours and to have the arrangement continue,” Niksic said.

**Vukicevic: Stability of B&H in Serbia’s interest (*Fena*)**

The stability, prosperity and successful EU integration of B&H are of great interest to Serbia, Serbian Ambassador to B&H Stanimir **Vukicevic** has said, adding that any changes in B&H are the result of agreements made within the country. Serbia recognizes B&H’s territorial integrity, the Constitution based on the Dayton Agreement and the reality inside that country, that it has two political entities and three constitutive peoples, Vukicevic stated. “Serbia will accept everything that is agreed within B&H through a consensus,” he told ***Fena***. Asked what kind of an attitude towards B&H could be expected from Serbia after the Serbian Progressive Party’s landslide victory, Vukicevic answered that Serbia had had a proactive relationship with B&H even before that event. “I can say with pleasure that last year was a year of intensive political dialogue, a year that showed both sides’ willingness to intensify dialogue and improve cooperation and relations. Serbia will continue such a trend,” he noted. All countries of the region have for the most part the same strategic goal, and that is peace and stability in the region, development of relations with neighbors, EU integration, better economic cooperation and finding space in markets outside the region, said the Ambassador.

**Nimetz sets new round of name issue talks (*Utrinski Vesnik*)**

UN mediator in the Greek-Macedonian name dispute Matthew **Nimetz** made an unprecedented move by setting a new round of negotiations on the name issue between Macedonia and Greece on 26 March, disregarding the forthcoming elections in the two countries, ***Utrinski Vesnik*** writes. A UN statement says that the two countries have accepted the invitation.  
The last talks on the issue were held in October 2013. After that Nimetz said that the two countries faced big differences in their positions. In his words Athens and Skopje are arguing on where the geographic term should be placed and not on whether there will be a geographic term at all.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Serbia’s election: A zealot in power (*The Economist*, 22 March 2014)**

*The big test for the newly powerful Aleksandar Vucic will be the economy*

THE outgoing prime minister of Serbia, Ivica Dacic, called it a “political tsunami.” Members of Aleksandar Vucic’s Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) said the election on March 16th went beyond their wildest dreams. For the opposition, the rout was beyond their worst nightmares. Mr Vucic, who will now become prime minister, can even govern without a coalition partner. Nobody has had so much power in his hands since the dark days of Slobodan Milosevic, whom Mr Vucic once served.

Mr Vucic’s SNS (and its allies) took 157 of the 250 seats in parliament; Mr Dacic’s Socialist coalition 45; the former ruling Democratic Party 19; and the New Democrats of Boris Tadic, a former president, 18. Much political deadwood has been cleared away, including Vojislav Kostunica, a right-wing nationalist and Eurosceptic.

Although he will not need coalition partners, Mr Vucic may well want them, not least to have others to blame when things go wrong. Still, even if he brings in Mr Tadic or Mr Dacic, there is no getting away from the fact that he is now the undisputed and unofficial master of Serbia. All responsibility will now lie with him. There will be no strong opposition in the new parliament.

During the Yugoslav wars Mr Vucic was a fanatical nationalist who wanted to create a Greater Serbia on the ruins of Bosnia and Croatia. But he no longer makes messianic and blood-curdling speeches. Instead, he talks calmly, pressing the tips of his fingers together as though trying to hold something back. Since 2008 he has espoused a pro-European policy. He talks of joint sessions of government with the Bosnians in Sarajevo and calls Croatia a friend. Serbia’s historic deal last year to normalise relations with Kosovo, which seceded in 2008, happened only with his permission. He is a Russophile, but even though Russia’s Vladimir Putin has been loudly comparing Crimea to Kosovo, Mr Vucic has given no inkling that he could lapse into his old nationalist self. Coalition politics meant that, in the outgoing government, Mr Vucic ceded the prime minister’s job to Mr Dacic. During the election he was friendly to Mr Tadic, who stabbed his old party in the back and started a new one just five weeks before the vote. In this way the already enfeebled opposition was diced and sliced. Mr Tadic’s new party enjoyed lots of television coverage; others did not. Control of the media through government advertising and other means is known in Serbia as “soft censorship”.

Mr Vucic has developed a zeal against corruption and for job creation. Coincidentally or not, none of those indicted for corruption, most of them connected to the opposition, were close to Mr Tadic. So far, arrests and indictments have been popular but convictions few. If Mr Dacic goes into opposition, says Bosko Jaksic, a commentator, some members of his Socialist Party might be “fresh meat” to serve up in the anti-corruption cause.

On March 18th Darko Saric, a wanted drug baron, arrived in Belgrade from Latin America after having been on the run since 2009. He is said to be ready to talk about his dealings with Serbian politicians and tycoons. A year ago the press reported meetings between Mr Dacic and an associate of Mr Saric known as Misha Banana.

Yet jobs will be Mr Vucic’s big test. Unemployment is running at 26%. Serbia’s middle classes complain that prices are so high that life is now harder than it has been for years. Mr Vucic is courting German and Italian business and has made friends with the United Arab Emirates, which gave Serbia a soft loan before the election. The UAE has also invested in Serbia’s national airline and plans to put money into a luxury riverside project, called Belgrade on Water.

In the centre of Belgrade stands a statue of Nikola Pasic, one of Serbia’ greatest leaders. With so much power in his hands Mr Vucic might yet also be commemorated. But if he fails, his image might deflate like the giant blow-up bunny rabbit temporarily installed nearby.

**Is Serbia Headed For 'Orbanization?' (*RFE/RL*, by Dragan Stavljanin, 21 March 2014)**

*Will Aleksandar Vucic use his dominance in parliament to push through reforms -- or just cement his own party's power in Serbia's institutions?*

The Serbian Progressive Party's (SNS) victory in the country's parliamentary elections had been forecast well before the March 16 poll. But the outright majority that the SNS secured, winning 157 out of 250 seats, was probably a surprise to the party itself.

The SNS, which is in the current government, campaigned on an anticorruption platform. The party also emphasized its drive to normalize relations with Kosovo, which was rewarded by Brussels with the opening of EU membership talks.

By contrast, the Democratic Party of Dragan Djilas and the splinter New Democratic Party of former Serbian President Boris Tadic -- which were instrumental in overthrowing Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic in 2000 -- barely managed to pass the 5 percent threshold to enter parliament.

Popular revulsion at the perceived corruption among the former democratic forces has created a paradox.

SNS leader Aleksandar Vucic, who embraced an ultranationalist agenda in the 1990s, now finds himself representing the pro-reform, pro-European camp. Vucic has pledged to overhaul Serbia's economy and state institutions and for this reason, he pushed for the early elections halfway through the government's term in order to get a stronger mandate.

'Stronger Than Milosevic'

But, the big question now is whether he will use his new parliamentary majority to implement badly needed reforms or just to strengthen his hold over society.

"The key point is how Vucic will use his power. We've been witnessing his strong grip over the media, controlling them 100 percent," says Gordana Susa, a Belgrade-based analyst. "Simultaneous processes are under way: media spin aimed at strengthening Vucic's power accompanied by the traditional story that Serbia needs strong leaders, etc."

The SNS's victory, with around 49 percent of the vote, is unrivaled since the introduction of a multiparty system in Serbia in 1990. Even Milosevic at the peak of his power only garnered 46 percent of the vote in his first election.

"Even Milosevic did not possess the power Vucic now has, except after his first election. Of course, Milosevic dominated in different ways," explains Florian Bieber, a professor at Austria's Graz University. "However, Milosevic was forced [after 1992] to share power in coalition governments. We'll see if Vucic intends to rule alone, but calling [an] early election is itself a bad omen, because he misused a democratic institution in a populist way just for the sake of his own party. Another problem is his unwillingness to get rid of the patronage system in state institutions, which are used for hiring the party's rank and file instead of professionals."

Analysts warn that Serbia could now face what they call a risk of "Orbanization," in reference to neighboring Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who has used his party's two-thirds majority in parliament to rule with increasing authoritarianism. Will Vucic resist the temptation to use what amounts to almost absolute power?

"If one party exerts such power, then there is a risk of its abuse. Whenever one party secures an outright majority it mostly leads to authoritarianism," Bieber says. "The rule of Victor Orban in Hungary is the most striking example. There are not enough strong institutions to control absolute power by setting necessary check and balances. The problem is even more vivid if such [a] party is dominated by one person, as Vucic in this case. This never bodes well, though intentions may be good."

**Serbia Democrats Turn on Leader After Poll Flop (*BIRN*, 21 March 2014)**

Senior officials of the opposition Democratic Party are gathering support to topple Dragan Djilas as leader, following the party's disastrous election result.

Dragan Sutanovac, member of the Democrats' main board, and Balsa Bozovic, leader of the party in Belgrade, are busy meeting members of party boards across Serbia to rally support against Dragan Djilas's leadership.

As Balkan Insight has learned from the Democrats, the two are urging party delegates not to support Djilas's report on party activities, which is due to be presented at the Democrats' presidency meeting on March 23.

Lack of support for the report would automatically mean a no-confidence vote in Djilas as party leader.

In 2012, Sutanovac and Bozovic competed to take over the helm of the Democrats in Belgrade.

But the two men have come together since the party won a dismal 6.04 per cent of votes in the March 16 general election. In the 2012 general election, the party won 22.07 per cent.

After losing power nationally in 2012, the Democrats publicly bickered until the former leader, Boris Tadic, left the party in January and founded a new party.

Djilas took over and was re-elected head of the party in January by 274 members of the central committee, while 127 voted against and 10 abstained.

Aleksandra Jerkov, Democratic Party spokesperson, said that her party had no reason to be happy with the election result, and the presidency would discuss it on March 23.

"The leadership's position will also be discussed, the responsibility of everyone will be addressed," Jerkov said.

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

**Croatia and the EU: Revisiting the Conditionality Principle (*The Huffington Post UK*, 18 March 2014)**

The European Union has not seen smooth sailing over the past few years. The EU has faced a number of challenges from a recession and a currency crisis to tension between hardline conservatives and liberal reformers and questions surrounding the expansion and identity of the EU.

The experience of Croatia, the newest state to join the EU, may prove enlightening when it comes to the EU's prospects for the future. This was the thesis of a talk given at the European Conference at Harvard by Ms. Vesna Pusic, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. Minister Pusic spoke on March 1, 2014 at the Harvard Kennedy School at a conference co-sponsored by Harvard and the Fletcher School at Tufts University.

Croatia's accession to the EU has been a long and involved process that has changed the country itself, but the EU has also changed in that period of time. It began 12 years ago, in 2001, with the ratification of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, laying the groundwork for relations between Europe and the Western Balkans countries. In 2003, Croatia officially applied for membership; then, in 2005, started the negotiations; and finally, on July 1, 2013, Croatia became an EU member state. The process of accession and negotiations and the accompanying reforms and adjustments were as important to Croatia as membership itself. On the flip side, Croatia's accession process may indicate some important changes for the EU itself.

Croatia's membership in the EU is in many ways the culmination of a long process of reconstruction after war in the 1990s after the breakup of former Yugoslavia. Croatia's EU accession was also an opportunity for a long-term guarantee of institutional stability in a state whose citizens almost universally remember that there is a realistic alternative to peace. During the process of negotiations for EU membership, Croatia moved its focus from "heroic" politics and issues to more "pedestrian" everyday concerns such as institutional design and regulation.

Pusic also emphasized the important role of European values such as freedom of movement, free market, political pluralism or individual freedoms were something that attracted Croatian citizens to EU membership and basically were never questioned. Today in Europe, we can see Eurosceptic movements that are very discriminating towards foreigners, minorities or anything that is different from something that is considered mainstream European society.

The EU accession has also created change in Croatia's foreign policy and Croatia's view of its place in the region. In the beginning of the accession process, the general attitude was that the objective would be for Croatia to join the Union and its neighbors to remain outside the EU. Over time, though, it became clear that in order to achieve the stability of the region, you needed to move the entire region toward this European framework.

For the European Union as a whole, Croatia's accession process and membership has signaled several key shifts. The first and most important has to do with the conditionality principle for EU accession. Traditionally, countries first have to meet certain conditions, go through negotiation process and then join the European Union. But Croatia may be the last country to join the EU under such conditionality principle.

For instance, in the cases of Serbia and Kosovo, normalization of their bilateral relations was not used for precondition for Serbia to start the negotiations, nor for Kosovo to start the negotiations for SAA, but this normalization of relations became part of their negotiating framework. Instead of demanding fulfillment of conditions before the start of negotiations, the EU has aimed to solve those issues within the negotiation process.

The EU is also experiencing enlargement fatigue and a debate over subsidiarity. Whereas the first eight countries of Eastern Europe to join in 2004 were welcomed with open arms, euroskepticism has set in since the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. Economic downturn and growing euroskepticism has resulted in a push for greater subsidiarity -- in other words, there is higher support for devolution of power from the EU back to individual member states, but also there is a rise of vocal eurosceptics in the European parliament, especially when you think about coming European elections in May and what can be the outcome of the elections.

The future of the EU likely involves more enlargement, but at a more cautious pace and a clarification of EU foreign policy toward its neighbors. EU accession of the Western Balkan countries should be understood not as enlargement, but as a consolidation of what is already European territory, given the fact that the area in question is relatively small and surrounded by EU member states, not to mention the fact that the region is of vital strategic significance to the European Union. The case of Turkey is very much different and it would be real enlargement, given the size of territory and population that would then join EU. And the countries of Eastern Partnership are very much different, but that have to be seen as area of cooperation and not as area of confrontation with Russian Federation.

The future is not clear and the path for the EU will not be smooth, but Pusic's talk provided valuable insight into the process of joining the EU and the future of the Union.

**Organisation Profile: VMRO – DPMNE (*BIRN*, 21 March 2014)**

The centre-right ruling party has a Christian Democrat-style orientation and advocates admission to NATO and the European Union.

Its leader, Nikola Gruevski, currently the country’s most popular politician, pledges to maintain the pace of economic reforms amid the still present effects of the world financial crisis.

VMRO DPMNE’s ratings have benefited from Gruevski’s tough line on Greek demands that Macedonia change its name as the price for gaining membership of NATO and the EU.

The party, founded in 1990, sees itself as heir to the original VMRO, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation, a 19th-century national liberation movement in the Ottoman Empire.

In Macedonia’s first multi-party elections in 1990, the party, then led by Ljubco Georgievski, came first but failed to form a government, after refusing to form a coalition with one of the ethnic Albanian parties.

After the party won again in 1998, VMRO DPMNE surprised observers by forming a coalition with the Democratic Party of Albanians, DPA.

In 1999, the VMRO DPMNE candidate, Boris Trajkovski, was elected Macedonia’s President. Once in office, however, Trajkovski pursued a moderate, non-party, line.

After an armed conflict erupted in 2001 with ethnic Albanian guerrillas, the party lost the following election in 2002. Georgievski then resigned and Gruevski took over. In the 2006 elections Gruevski won, promising economic revival.

After failed talks with the biggest Albanian party, the Democratic Union for Integration, DUI, Gruevski invited the Democratic Party of Albanians, DPA, into government. This angered the DUI, which said the move ignored the will of Albanian voters.

Following the 2008 June early general election, which VMRO DPMNE also won, it changed its coalition partner. As the DUI had again beaten the DPA in the election, the DUI was invited into the coalition government instead of the DPA. The ruling party and its minor partners held 63 of the 120 seats in parliament.

In the 2009 presidential and local elections, VMRO DPMNE won most mayoral posts, including the mayoralty of the capital, Skopje. Its candidate, Gjorge Ivanov, a university professor, not a VMRO-DPMNE member, also won the presidential elections in March, beating the Social Democrat, Ljubomir Frckoski.

At the end of summer 2009, under pressure from the European Commission, parliament passed several laws to expedite EU integration. Brussels then recommended a start to accession talks, widely seen as a triumph for the VMRO-DPMNE-led government.

However, Macedonia failed to gain a date for negotiations to start at the December 2009 EU summit owing to Greek objections over the “name” issue.

In 2010, VMRO DPMNE’s popularity ratings started to fall by a small percentage. However, the party still had comfortable lead over the main opposition Social Democrats, the SDSM.

This, plus pressure by the opposition for early elections, was used by VMRO-DPMNE to call new elections in June 2011, which it again won. However, this time it controlled only 56 of 123 seats in parliament. It again formed a government in coalition with the DUI.

International pressure on the government to solve the name dispute with Greece continued without results.

Meanwhile, the government promoted a grand revamp of the capital, known as “Skopje 2014”. Its supporters say it will add new splendour to the neglected capital, with impressive new concert halls, museums, monuments and other buildings drawing inspiration from Classical Antiquity.

Opponents have called it a waste of money and a diversion from the country’s real problems, such as high unemployment, poverty and stalled progress towards EU and NATO accession.

Since 2010, opposition parties and some NGOs have accused the ruling party of curbing media freedom. After the 2011 elections, the biggest private TV station closed following the arrest of its owner for tax fraud. A leader of the opposition United for Macedonia party, Ljube Boskovski, a former VMRO-DPMNE member, was also arrested for fraud. The party denied any involvement in these actions, saying it had nothing to do with judicial moves.

The biggest recent challenge to VMRO-DPMNE’s authority was the incidents in parliament on December 24, 2012, which created a serious political crisis. After protesting against the vote for the Budget Law for 2013, police threw opposition MPs out of parliament. Before this, security guards also expelled journalists from parliament.

Outside parliament, pro-government and pro-opposition groups clashed in the streets, prompting opposition deputies to boycott parliament, demanding early elections and threatening to boycott the April 2013 local elections. The crisis only ended in March 2013, following the conclusion of a deal facilitated by the EU and European Parliamentarians.

Despite the crisis, controversies over Skopje 2014 and allegations of corruption in the media, VMRO-DPMNE maintained its high ratings. This was confirmed in the local elections in 2013, when the party won in almost all municipalities.

The VMRO-DPMNE era has become known for rolling campaigns, consisting of government advertisements in the media, almost daily press conferences, and ministerial visits and statements promoting implemented projects and successes.

On the other hand, amongst its critics, the VMRO-DPMNE era will be remembered also for high unemployment, poverty and loss of media freedom.

VMRO-DPMNE claims that unemployment has fallen below the level of 30 per cent, that it has combated poverty by increasing the salaries of civil servants and pensions, has aided agriculture with subsidies, and has attracted foreign investment. It denies problems about media freedom and says that Macedonia is now the least debt-ridden country in Europe.

After elections were scheduled for March 2014, VMRO-DPMNE issues a detailed report on all the projects it has implemented since 2011, maintaining that more than 1,000 important promised projects had been executed.

However, under VMRO-DPMNE’s guidance, Macedonia fell by 84 positions on the “Reporters without borders” World Press Freedom Index 2014, ranked in 123rd place out of 180 countries. Macedonia is also now on the list of countries with jailed journalists, after Tomislav Kezarovski, a reporter from Nova Makedonija newspaper, was convicted in 2013 of revealing the identity of an protected witness in an article. He was jailed for four-and-a-half years.

It will also be noted that, despite all measures and reforms to fight poverty and unemployment, Macedonia was ranked on the “Misery index” of Britain’s “Economist” magazine in first place in Europe with a poverty rate of 30 per cent.

This matched data issued by the State Statistics bureau in 2011, which said that 30.4 per cent of citizens in Macedonia lived in poverty.

Aware of its high ratings in autumn 2013, VMRO-DPMNE contemplated calling early elections but the idea was refused both by its coalition partner, the DUI, as well as by the opposition Social Democrats. Later in 2013, the DUI asked for a consensual presidential candidate to be agreed between the two parties, threatening to boycott the elections. VMRO-DPMNE rejected this, saying it had a right to choose its own presidential candidate.

After presidential elections were called in February, VMRO DPMNE gave its full support to Gjorge Ivanov for second mandate. In answer to this, DUI filled a motion in parliament calling for early elections, which VMRO DPMNE accepted.

**Montenegro Ruling Party Replaces Controversial Mayor (*BIRN*, by Dusica Tomovic, 21 March 2014)**

Miomir Mugosa's long reign as Mayor of Podgorica is coming to an end as the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists, DPS, puts up a new face in the spring election.

After months of speculation about who will succeed Mugosa as mayor of the capital, the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists, DPS, on Thursday named the Minister of Education, Slavoljub Stijepovic, as head of the list in the Podgorica local elections scheduled for May.

Mugosa was Podgorica's mayor for more than 14 years but became notorious for confrontations with journalists. In 2011, he was convicted of having caused serious injuries to the editor of Vijesti newspaper, Mihailo Jovovic.

Analysts say the spring elections in Podgorica are a key test for the ruling DPS-led coalition at national level, as well as for the opposition, which has taken control of two municipalities in Montenegro this year.

Mugosa is held responsible for the break-up of a coalition between Djukanovic's DPS and the Social Democratic Party, SDP, the smaller ruling party, at city level.

The SDP quit the local government in Podgorica in 2010 and has said it will not re-establish cooperation with DPS while Mugosa is the mayor.

"The SDP is open for talks and prospective post-election cooperation with DPS if the bearer of the party list in the spring elections in Podgorica is not Miomir Mugosa," the party said.

A senior official of the ruling DPS, Tarzan Milosevic, denied that the decision to replace Mugosa was a "signal" to the SDP to form a post-election coalition with the DPS.

“If we had wanted to meet the desire of the SDP for Mugosa not be mayor, we would have done it four years ago,” Milosevic said on Thursday.

**Slovenia jobless rate hits highest level in a decade (*EUbusiness*, 18 March 2014)**

(LJUBLJANA) - Slovenia's unemployment rate surged in January to its highest level since the country joined the European Union in 2004, official data showed Tuesday, as the eurozone country struggles to get out of recession.

The country's statistics office said the number of registered unemployed reached 14.2 percent of the workforce.

There were nearly 130,00 people unemployed in January, compared to just more than 124,000 in December 2013, the statisticians said.

Slovenia, once a star newcomer to the European Union and eurozone, has been in recession since 2011 and last year there were fears that it would need a bailout.

The country managed however to recapitalise its top banks in December without becoming the sixth eurozone state to seek international aid.

With the government pushing forward on reforms and a recovery in the eurozone, Slovenia's economy is also expected to rebound and official forecasts see growth at 0.5 percent this year.

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