** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Monday, 24 March 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**From intervention to full independence (*Danas*, by Jelena Tasic)**

With the laying of wreaths, memorial services in all sanctuaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church and appropriate congregations, the 15th anniversary of the commencement of the NATO bombardment of the FR Yugoslavia will be marked today. The NATO air campaign was conducted without the approval of the United Nations. The state of Serbia so far has not announced the final number of victims of the NATO aggression. The media, for already a decade-and-a-half, have every 24 March reiterated that, between 1,200 and 4,000 people were killed during the bombardment, even twice as high as have been cited in the past. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the NATO bombardment, the then Serbian government headed by Mirko **Cvetkovic**, announced that, at the proposal of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Serbian government would build in Belgrade a memorial center and monument to all victims, but neither the government nor the Church had ever mentioned this over the past five years.

Counting the 19 NATO member states and countries that otherwise supported the intervention, in total 26 states took part in the attack. In the course of 78 days of bombing, during which 1,300 cruise missiles were launched, some 37,000 “cluster bombs” were thrown and ammunition with depleted uranium, banned by international conventions, was used, damages were incurred against the infrastructure, industrial facilities, schools, health institutions, media houses, monuments of culture… Serbian estimates of material damages are various and range between 30 and 100 billion Dollars.

Even though the former Yugoslav foreign minister Zivadin **Jovanovic** now claims that official Washington had been threatening Belgrade with a military intervention since 1992, the NATO bombardment started on 24 March 1999 after the unsuccessful negotiations on Kosovo and Metohija in Rambouillet and Paris. The aggression on the FR Yugoslavia ended with the signing of the Military-Technical Agreement in Kumanovo on 9 June 1999 and the adoption of Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council, based on which the UN protectorate was introduced in Kosovo and Metohija.

Nearly 1,500 Serbs were killed and the same number of Serbs went missing and was abducted, under the UN civil and military administration, while estimates on the number of internally displaced range up to over 200,000. After the March pogrom against the Kosovo Serbs in 2004, the international community accelerated the process of resolving the future status of Kosovo and Metohija. It organized two rounds of unsuccessful negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina during 2006 and 2007, after which the leading western states supported Martti **Ahtisaari’s** plan on supervised independence of Kosovo. Even though this plan didn’t pass in the UN Security Council, the West initiated and recognized the self-declared Kosovo independence at the beginning of 2008.

Belgrade has not so far officially recognized Pristina’s unilateral moves, but over disagreement regarding the deployment of EULEX in Kosovo and Metohija, the then “cohabitation” government in Serbia of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and Democratic Party (DS) broke up. The new government initially agreed with the deployment of EULEX, considered by certain political circles to be the beginning of “crawling recognition” of the self-declared Kosovo state, and then agreed to shift the resolution of the Kosovo issue from the UN to the EU. The present government of Ivica **Dacic** has promoted the Brussels technical dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina into political negotiations and signed last year the Brussels agreement, whose assessment of constitutionality has been examined in the Serbian Constitutional Court since May 2013.

The “Kosovo precedent” has started to spread around the world like a “domino effect” and one of the latest examples are Ukraine and Crimea. As regards the NATO enlargement, Montenegro could receive an invitation for membership in the Alliance in May, 15 years after the bombardment, while Serbia joined two weeks ago the two-week military exercise in Bulgaria in which soldiers of 11 NATO and partner countries are taking part. Official Pristina expects the Kosovo Security Forces to become soon the Kosovo armed forces with NATO’s help.

**UN not ready to provide compensation to victims in Kosovo (*Politika*)**

There is no readiness within the United Nations to provide compensation to victims of serious violation of human rights in Kosovo, this is the conclusion of the Advisory Commission for human rights that has just published the annual report. The commission that examines complaints on human rights violations perpetrated by UNMIK has brought numerous opinions over the past year whereby it was established that there had been most serious human rights violations by UNMIK, including the violation of the right to life and ban of torture (according to articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights). This commission has earlier established that UNMIK didn’t investigate abductions and murders that occurred after it arrived in Kosovo. The report points to the responsibility of the special representative of the UN secretary general – the post presently performed by Afghani Farid Zarif – to publicly state his opinion on how he will react to the recommendations of this advisory body. The commission, which especially points out the importance of the right to truth, considers that the past response of the UNMIK Head is unsatisfactory. The victims of human rights violations in Kosovo and Metohija (primarily the Serbs) received letters in which Ban Ki-moon’s representative voices “sincere regret” over the human rights violations by UNMIK. “However, this is far from fulfilling the recommendations of the commission that it is necessary to send a public apology over these violations (of human rights),” it is stated in the introductory address of the Chairman of the Commission Marek Nowitsky. “As it had been pointed out in previous reports, there are still no visible signs of readiness within the UN system to provide adequate compensation, including financial compensation to victims of human rights violations identified by the commission.”

**Participation in Kosovo parliamentary elections with Serbian or Kosovo documents (*Politika*)**

Parliamentary elections that are organized by the interim authorities in Pristina will be held this year, but there is still no precise date and the Law on general elections is still in parliamentary procedure, where the Serbs submitted amendments so all Serbs (displaced as well) would be allowed to vote with Serbian documents issued by the Serbian Interior Ministry. Hajredin Kuci’s spokesperson Driton **Laitsi** tells ***Politika*** that the date for holding elections for the Kosovo Assembly has not been set yet. Asked by Politika whether the Serbs will be able to vote with Serbian IDs issued by the Serbian Interior Ministry, or they will not be able to exercise their voting right if they don’t possess Kosovo documents, Laitsi answers: “I think Kosovo IDs will be needed. However, the decision has not been made yet, it is still early to talk about that.” The Police Minister in the Kosovo government Bajram **Rexhepi** similarly opines: “Kosovo documents will be needed most probably.” In comment to Politika that the Serbs were able to vote with a Serbian IDs at the local Kosovo elections in November last year, Rexhepi says “this is how things were in November” but that he is more than certain that Kosovo documents will be needed. The draft law on Kosovo general elections is in parliament procedure, and the new law reduces the right of Serbs and other minority communities. Namely, according to that draft law, only people with Kosovo citizenship can be on the election list. If a compromise solution between the Belgrade and Pristina working groups is not reached in Brussels, it is quite certain that only ten Serb MPs will be sitting in the assembly, also stipulated by law, i.e. this is the ten guaranteed seats not even disputed by the draft of the new Kosovo law. Namely, if all Serbs do not possess Kosovo documents, turnout will be significantly reduced, having in mind that, as far as northern Kosovo is concerned, rarely anyone possesses Kosovo documents. The outgoing chairman of the parliament Committee for Kosovo and Metohija Milovan **Drecun** says that a compromise between Belgrade and Pristina must be reached at one of the future talks in Brussels, as otherwise “if Pristina insists on Kosovo IDs the question is how democratic these elections will be.” “One of the proposals could be for Serbs in northern Kosovo to vote with Serbian documents, i.e. those with Kosovo documents to vote with Kosovo, and as far the Serbs south of the Ibar River are concerened we all know that almost all Serbs in those municipalities possess documents issued by the interim authorities in Pristina. They could not have survived in any other way,” Drecun tells Politika, warning that if Pristina assumes a hard position and doesn’t want to cooperate, turnout at the parliamentary elections will be very small as far as the Serb community is concerned.

**Bozovic: UNMIK and EULEX to solve the problems of Serbs (*Tanjug*)**

At a meeting with the State Secretary of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry Bard Glad **Pedersen**, outgoing State Secretary at the Serbian Interior Ministry Vladimir **Bozovic** stressed the need that UNMIK and EULEX decisively engage in solving specific problems of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, and in fighting organized crime and corruption. Bozovic, who was on an official visit to the Kingdom of Norway, praised the work of the international investigative task force, led by Clint **Williamson**, and also pointed to Serbia’s strong support to the proposed establishment of a special court for war crimes and human organ trafficking in Kosovo. At the international UN conference concerning police role and capacities in peace missions in Oslo, Bozovic stated that Serbia is committed to participation in the police and military peace operations. Bozovic said that in 2013 only, the number of Serbian Army members participating in peace missions in the world was almost equal to that number in the past 11 years. According to him, this year, it is planned to send 500 Serbian Army members to 284 positions in multinational UN and EU operations.

**European justice died in Serbia (*Novosti*)**

When unprecedented media hysteria against the “bad” Serbs started in 1999 throughout the European media, along with the illegal NATO bombardment, among those rare voices which stood behind the people being bombed was a German, Admiral Elmar Ludwig **Schmeling**, former head of the German intelligence agency and later the head of the NATO Counter-Intelligence Service. Even though he had been retired at the time, Schmeling’s officer authority was sufficient for his words to echo in Germany: “I am ashamed as a man and officer that my country is attacking small Serbia for the third time in this century!”

Admiral Schmeling was again in Belgrade over the past weekend at the marking of 15 years since the aggression on FRY.

**In April 1999 you exposed to the media the NATO myth on the supposed ‘humanitarian intervention’ of NATO in Yugoslavia towards endangered Albanians.**

“Yes, I pointed out that the assertion of Rudolf **Scharping**, the then German defense minister, that there is a Serbian genocidal war plan code named “Potkova” (“Horse Shoe in English) aimed at expelling Albanians from the province of Kosovo, was an ordinary lie, since such a word doesn’t even exist in the Serbian language and that makes it obviously something that was cooked up in the NATO kitchen. I also pointed to the public Berlin’s official documents, more precisely of the Federal Institute for verification of refugees from March 1999, where it was clearly stated that, in Yugoslavia, there is no state program of expelling people from the province of Kosovo. Refugees and humanitarian crisis in the province started only after NATO bombs started to fall and this is the full truth.”

**At the time when you stood “behind” the Serbs, you had already not been a serving NATO admiral for nine years. You were retired.**

“I was sent into retirement because it was ‘time’ already, according to the discretionary right of the German authorities to retire officers that are not to their taste. Concretely, I loudly advocated in NATO headquarters in Brussels after the unification of Germany, the need to the change NATO’s structure and policy, after the unification of Germany, since NATO was adopting more aggressive doctrines and strategies of use. Up until the unification of Germany, this was a defense military alliance, whereas, afterwards, it turned into an aggressive alliance. That coincides with the beginning of the internal wars on the territory of former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), in which NATO and Germany actively interfered.”

**Right after the bombing, in July, you visited Yugoslavia. What did you see?**

“Even though I am a trained military professional, I was startled with the degree of destruction in your country and the targets that were attacked. Two crimes in one were perpetrated against the Serbians. First, the crime is that the bombs were thrown in the first place, and the second, even bigger, is using unreasonably large amounts of banned ammunition, such as that with depleted uranium, and the incredible number of cluster bombs thrown.”

**As soon as you returned to Germany, you filed a criminal complaint against Scharping, Fischer and Schroeder to the Federal court because they “violated Article 80. of the state law” which bans use of the German army in aggressive wars. How did this end?**

“They didn’t even take into consideration the complaint. Still, we founded, in Berlin, the European Peace Tribunal, where many wise people from Europe and the world are participating and this court symbolically condemned German leaders for bombing Serbia. Justice and international law were killed with the bombing of your small independent country in 1999, which flew in the face of the decisions of the UN Security Council.”

**Venice sinking into independence (*Politika*)**

The goals of the four-day referendum on the secession of the Veneto region from Italy – counting from last week at 3p.m. until Friday same time – were fulfilled four hours before the voting procedure ended, the organizers of the referendum announced. According to official data of the regional commission, 1.993.780 of Veneto residents voted until that moment at the online referendum for independence, which represents 53.41 percent of the electoral body. Politika learns from the organizer of the online referendum, that around 95 percent voted for secession. The initiator of the referendum Gianluca Busato, also called the father of the referendum, said this result was a “triumph of the digital revolution” considering that the voting took place electronically. Busato voiced assurance that until the closure of voting lines, 3 p.m. Friday, the final goal, set by the organizers, will be fulfilled, i.e. that Veneto residents will support by a two-third majority the road of this province towards independence. At the final ceremony of the referendum campaign, at the Signori square in Treviso – a town considered the land part of Venice and the capital of the province of the same name, one of the seven regional provinces within Veneto – they were supposed to elect a ten-member commission that would launch negotiations with Rome on secession from Italy, but also declare the first measures that would lead towards secession, i.e. the formation of the Republic of Venice, as the name of the new state should be in the future. The first measure will refer to the distribution of income. Italy would thus be left, as early as this summer, without income taxes from the province that is in the statistics of the gross domestic product on the third position among 20 Italian regions. Until now, Veneto has paid 71 billion Euros annually to the accounts of the central government in Rome, on behalf of the collected direct and indirect taxes. According to the plan of the Veneto League, the sister organization of the League for North, as of June this year the province will keep the directly collected taxes, around 21 billion Euros, and then it will withhold to Rome, in phases, the payment of indirect taxes, around 22 billion Euros, and social contributions in the amount of 21 billion Euros. The difference of seven billion Euros that Veneto pays to the accounts of the central government for repayment of so-called “European debts” is not brought into question for the time being. Veneto’s final secession, first steps of which have been announced for June this year, should be realized in June, one of the following years, depending on the speed of progress in the negotiations with Rome. Why was precisely June chosen for secession? Busato says that he and his associates had the example of Montenegro while preparing the referendum initiative on Veneto’s independence, which, after separation from Serbia in June 2006, was recognized by the then EU member states as an independent country and became a UN member. Of course, the question remains open – how will Rome react to the demand of the Venetians. In the past reactions, official Italy spoke about the referendum with ridicule and called it a private initiative that has a parlor character and not a political. The organizers were told, among other things, voting electronically is illegal, and that comparison is without basis with the U.S. where the president of the state is elected electronically, as well as with Latvia and Switzerland, whose election results are recognized by Europe and the world. However, the Veneto league points to the recommendation of the European Commission 2007/36/EG on accepting electronic voting, also, by the way, referred to by Latvia and Switzerland when passing the law on the digital procedure of elections. Still, in order to avoid quirks later on, the organizers announced the holding of one more referendum on secession, once the final results of the negotiations on secession with Rome are known. “We leave it to Rome to decide which modality will be applied. The people of Veneto will either way vote for the road of the Republic of Venice towards independence,” says the President of Veneto Luca Zaia, who decided not to vote fearing the consequences in case of a negative outcome of the referendum.

**They looked up to SCG**

Those comparing our referendum with similar initiatives for independence in Catalonia and Scotland, should know that our guiding idea was – peaceful and civilized break-up from neighbors, said Gianluca Busato, adding that “a textbook example of democratic respect of the will of one nation inside a state was precisely given by Serbia and Montenegro in 2006.”

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**EC warns Sarajevo (*Dnevni Avaz*)**

“If it wants to become an EU member, B&H will have to amend the present constitution,” EU Enlargement Commission Stefan **Fule** told ***Dnevni Avaz***. Fule stresses that the constitutional amendments will be necessary in the course of the EU accession process, but refused to speak about the proportions of the future constitutional amendments before abolishment of the national discrimination from the election legislature, ordered by the European Court for Human Rights in the *Sejdic-Finci* case. “Discrimination of national minority members in the B&H election process represents violation of undertaken international obligations and the Stabilization and Association Agreement cannot come into force until this is resolved,” said Fule.

**RS authorities preparing arrest of opposition leaders (*Srna*)**

The leader of the People’s Democratic Movement (NDP) Dragan **Cavic** stated that he has reliable information, according to which the current authorities plan to arrest some opposition representatives in the Republika Srpska (RS). Cavic says this information is from the “very top” of the ruling Association of Independent Social-Democrats (SNSD), but didn’t wish to specify who could be arrested. Cavic further says there is reasonable suspicion that the SNSD “by way of the RS Interior Ministry is organizing tapping of political opponents,” stressing that RS Interior Minister Radislav **Jovicic** is also involved in this and that a new technology has been acquired for direct tapping from vehicles with adequate devices. The current RS government, according to Cavic, is also preparing to engage the complete public and institutional system for the needs of the election campaign. He gives as proof the personnel shifts at the helm of the Radio Television of the RS. “Drasko **Milinovic**, who used to be the head of the cabinet of Prime Minister Zeljka **Cvijanovic** and before that of the RS President Milorad **Dodik**, was appointed to the post of the Director General of RTRS. This means that RTRS will continue to be a service of one party,” assessed Cavic.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Ex foes Serbia, Kosovo 15 years after NATO air war on EU path (*EUbusiness.com*, 23 March 2014)**

(BELGRADE) - When NATO launched its first air campaign on European soil in 1999 to force Serbia to halt crackdown on independence-seeking Kosovo, the European Union was far from minds of both Belgrade and Pristina.

Now, fifteen years later, the former bitter foes have made their first steps on the European path, after reaching historic accord on normalisation of relations last April under a watchful EU mediation.

Although Serbia steadfastly refuses to recognise the independence of its former, majority ethnic-Albanian province, it has normalised ties to a degree allowing it in January to open EU membership talks.

Kosovo also has agreement to enter talks on an EU stabilisation and association deal -- a lesser pact that is first step on a long path towards possible EU membership.

But the 1999 NATO bombing campaign which lasted 78 days still remains etched deep in public memory.

On March 24 of that year, the Atlantic alliance launched its air strikes -- without UN Security Council backing -- after late Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic spurned a peace deal to end his forces' repression on ethnic Albanian guerrillas fighting for the independence of Kosovo.

- Crimea referendum brings back memories -

The disputed referendum on March 16 this year in which Crimeans voted overwhelmingly to secede from Ukraine and join Russia has brought back memories both in Kosovo and Serbia.

After years of condemning Kosovo's secession, Moscow cited it as a precedent for its actions in Crimea.

Analyst Miodrag Radojevic of Belgrade-based Institute For Political Studies said the link could be made between 1999 NATO bombings and Crimea referendum, as "both have no legitimate legal foundations".

"But globally, the 1999 bombings were a precedent that has grown into a sort of custom, as we can see nowadays in Crimea," he said.

After the end of the bombings in June 1999, Kosovo was placed under UN administration, with NATO-led peacekeepers providing security on its territory.

In 2008, Pristina unilaterally declared independence which has so far been recognised by more than 100 countries, including the United States and most of the European Union's 28 member states.

Although Belgrade still rejects Pristina's independence, a "certain level of placability could be seen towards Kosovo's separation," said Radojevic.

Taking part in EU-mediated talks with Pristina "shows that (Belgrade) has de facto recognised the situation on the ground," he added.

But a further normalisation is possible "only if EU opens its doors to both sides, providing a clear European perspective" for the former foes, said Pristina-based political analyst Adrian Qollaku.

"If it was not for the EU and their promising carrot and threatening stick, the two sides would never even try to normalise their relation," said 19-year old student Valon Istrefi.

- Nightmares of bombings still persist -

Even with their eyes fixed on the EU-bound future, the views of the 1999 bombings will always be different in Serbia and Kosovo.

In Belgrade, the Milosevic-era defence and interior ministry buildings, severely hit by NATO missiles, still stand in ruins in one of the main avenues.

But in Kosovo, also severely hit by the bombings mostly on Serbia's security forces positions, there are no traces left.

At the site once housing the headquarters of Serbian police in central Pristina, modern offices now used as the Kosovo Interior Ministry were built, thanks to the EU funds.

And Kosovo security forces moved into a former Serbian army garrison on the outskirts of Pristina, bombed to the ground and soon built its barracks, decorated with Kosovo's blue-and-yellow flag.

Now 32, ethnic Albanian Qerim Ahmeti was a teenager when NATO missile hit the police headquarters in Pristina in 1999. It was, he said, like "an earthquake and thunder at the same time".

"But we were not afraid and we only prayed to God to live and see Serbia's forces withdrawal from Kosovo," Ahmeti told AFP.

In Belgrade, his Serbian peer Vlatka Reljic still avoids the shortest path to her home in a Belgrade suburb, mistakenly hit in what was later described as a NATO "blunder".

"I don't think I will ever walk along that trail again. It was not my war, and I still have nightmares about the bombardment of my city," she said.

Official Serbian figures say some 2,500 civilians were killed and 12,500 injured during 11 weeks of bombing.

Human Rights Watch put the civilian death toll of the NATO bombing at around 500.

**Serbia’s Snap Elections: A Crushing Progressive Victory And Increasing Demand For Reforms – Analysis (*Journal of Turkish Weekly*, by Hamdi Fýrat Büyük, 22 March 2014)**

After the resignation of Serbian Economy Minister Radulavic, Serbia’s Progressive Party (SNS) called for snap elections on the same day as Belgrade’s municipal election. The former economy minister stated that the reasons for his resignation were Serbia’s reform-resistant economic environment and a lack of support in the government for the EU reforms.

A short time after calling for snap elections, President Nikolic of the SNS ratified the early elections. Last Sunday elections were held in which the Progressives aimed to double their votes.

A clear victory for Serbia’s Progressive Party

The SNS, led by current Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic, took 48.44 percent of the votes in parliamentary elections Sunday, winning 158 seats in the 250-seat National Assembly, according to official results.

The other parties’ votes in Serbia’s early election are as follows: the currently ruling Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS)—14.05 percent of the votes for 44 seats, the New Democratic Party (NDS) led by former President Boris Tadic—5.86 percent for 19 seats, and Tadic’s former party, the Democratic Party (DS)—5.46 percent for 17 seats, according to the Republic Electoral Commission.

The minority parties of Serbia, the Alliance of Vojvodina’s Hungarians, the (Muslim Bosniak) Party of Democratic Action of Sandzak led by the current development minister, Dr. Sulejman Ugljanin, and the Party for Democratic Action representing ethnic Albanians in southern Serbia, won 3.01 percent, nine seats; 1.09 percent, three seats; and 0.89 percent, two seats, respectively.

According to Serbia’s election law there is a 5% threshold in order to enter Serbia’s National Assembly, but this law is not applied to minority parties.

Vucic can set a coalition government for the constitutional change

According to official results, the Progressives’ Vucic can found a government, but it is expected that Vucic will make a coalition mostly with the New Democratic Party led by former President Tadic or with the Democratic Party.

Vucic needs nine more seats in order to change the constitution in line with the EU and effect some fundamental reforms on the public sector, corruption, organized crime, and the economy. For this reason Serbia’s next government may indeed be a coalition government.

OSCE: Elections were successful and full of trust, no irregularities

International observers said in a statement late last night that Sunday’s early parliamentary elections in Serbia offered voters a genuine choice, were conducted on a sound legal basis, and that fundamental freedoms were respected throughout the campaign.“Voters and representatives of political parties, alike, expressed a high degree of trust in the electoral process—something all citizens can be proud of,” added Roberto Battelli, the Special Co-ordinator who led the short-term OSCE observer mission.

Vucic: We will not fight for the next elections but for the next generations

In his victory speech the next Prime Minister of Serbia, Vucic, thanked the people of Serbia for the “huge support you have given us, the strength you have given us to achieve the best result in 25 years. We will not humiliate anyone because of the results. We want to hear from everyone their ideas, and we are prepared to speak to all relevant parties. But we have confirmed our main partnership which is with the people of Serbia. Serbia has a future in which its children will live much better than they do today.”

Vucic continued that it will not be easy to get there but “we have an opportunity to show we can be different, we can work more, and we can be more responsible.”

“I am sure that Serbia will continue its European path, its struggle against corruption but this government will be mainly dealing with the problem of unemployment and by the middle of our mandate I am certain you will see the results,” he added.

Serbia’s changing political environment

Serbia’s Progressive Party continues to increase its share of power in the country’s politics. After the presidential election that elected the SNS’s Nikolic, Vucic signalled that his party would become dominant while the wartime ruling Socialist Party fell apart.

After the socialist era, Milosevic ruling, for the first time a political party won the majority of votes in the elections. Also, unlike the current and previous parliaments, Serbia’s National Assembly has only four major political parties plus minority parties. In the past, 14-15 political parties could win seats in the parliament, and establishing governments was very difficult.

The diversification of Serbia’s political environment turned into a system of major political parties and one party dominance. This situation is clearly related to people’s surfeit for the coalitions and the unstable political and economic environment in Serbia.

Minorities and the new government

The three ethnic minorities of Serbia—Muslim Bosniaks from the Sandzak Region, Hungarians from Vojvodina, and Albanians from the southern part of the country—have entered the National Assembly through their political parties. As with previous governments, it is expected that all minority parties will be represented in the government according to Serbia’s political tradition. In this way Belgrade wants to strength its relations with its minorities.

Thanks to this political practice it would be easy and warranted to say that minorities are represented and their rights are defended effectively, but there is still much criticism regarding Serbia and minority rights, especially concerning Sandzak’s Muslims and Vojvodina’s Hungarians—the biggest minority group in Serbia.

Results, the EU and Kosovo

According to the official results, the Serbian people have shown their intent to continue down the EU path. The Vucic-led Progressive party is the key player in Serbia’s EU integration process, and the accession talks with the EU started in late January of this year. The people of Serbia obviously favor reform, change, political stability, and economic recovery as promised by the Progressive Party.

Also, it should be emphasized that the people of Serbia and political elites accept that EU membership is the main motivating matter for the country’s pending fundamental reforms.

Late last year after long talks in Brussels, Kosovo and Serbia signed an agreement under the auspices of the EU in order to normalize relations. Serbia still claims its rights over Kosovo—Belgrade still considers Kosovo a part of Serbia. However, many experts believe that Serbia will normalize relations with Kosovo without recognizing it in exchange for EU membership. Serbia accepts the existence of an authority in Kosovo but Kosovo will remain a quasi-state for Belgrade, like South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Conclusion

The Progressive Party of Serbia won an unmistakable victory that has not been seen since the 1999 elections. Serbia’s people have decided that the country should move down the path to reforms, stability, and the EU.

Vucic’s victory shows that Serbia’s political environment is changing and that EU membership will be the most prominent matter in Serbia’s politics over the short term because the government needs the EU’s motivating power and perspective in the reform process.

**War is over – now Serbs and Bosniaks fight to win control of a brutal history (*The Guardian*, by Julian Borger, 23 March 2014)**

*Serb nationalists trying to suppress reminders of atrocities committed against country's Muslims 20 years ago*

After survivors and bereaved families put up a memorial to the mass slaughter in 1992 of Muslims in Višegrad, the response of the Serb authorities in the eastern Bosnian town was as unsubtle as it was symbolic. They ordered the word "genocide" chiselled off the stone monument.

A group of Višegrad widows soon restored the word in lipstick, only for it to be obscured by municipal white paint a few days later. This is a battle the town hall is not prepared to lose. When it sent a surveyor and workman into the town's Muslim cemetery with an angle grinder to erase the offending term on 23 January, they were accompanied by 150 policemen in riot gear. The message was clear.

The graveyard spat is a skirmish in a much bigger battle being fought in Bosnia – the continuation by bureaucratic means of the murderous four-year war of two decades ago. It is a struggle over collective memory and the power to write history.

"Those who committed the war crimes against us are still winning. They are killing our truth," said Bakira Hasecic, a Višegrad survivor who was raped multiple times by Serb paramilitaries at her home and in the local police station in 1992. Her sister was raped and killed. Her 18-year-old daughter was raped and had her head smashed by a rifle butt, but survived.

Hasecic now runs the Association of Women Victims of War. She and other Višegrad rape victims tried to protect the monument last month but failed because the town authorities turned up an hour earlier than announced, and in force.

"The huge numbers of police in their uniforms and caps brought back the memories of 1992. You relive those moments. My legs were shaking. When we arrived, we had no idea they had already done that to the monument. People started crying when they found out. I couldn't bring myself to look at it."

However, the same morning and less than 200 yards away, Hasecic and other Bosniak survivors were successful in stopping another act of demolition. The Serb authorities want to knock down a house on Pionirska Street, where 59 Muslim women, children and pensioners were locked into a single room and incinerated on 14 June 1992. Relatives of the dead, with Hasecic's help, are trying to restore the house as a memorial.

The town council has countered by expropriating the building, claiming the road needs to be widened. Yet the house is set well back from the existing road and the immediate Serb neighbours – who have mostly been supportive of the Bosniaks' restoration attempts, offering to help with water and electricity connections – say no other houses on the street have been targeted in the same way.

But no one in the neighbourhood believes the issue is really about town planning. Serb nationalists are striving to suppress reminders of atrocities committed in the name of separatism, mostly against the country's Muslims (known as Bosniaks) and to construct an alternative history in which Serbs were the principal victims. Many Bosniaks and outside observers fear that this refusal to come to terms with the past means there are few guarantees that such acts will not be repeated.

Bosniaks and Croats have also been slow to allow memorials to civilian victims from other ethnicities, but it is in the Republika Srpska, the Serb-run half of Bosnia, where the scale of the killing was by far the greatest, and where the culture of denial is now the deepest.

Višegrad is a grim example. An eastern Bosnian town set dramatically along a break in the white limestone ravines of the River Drina, it is home to Bosnia's best-known cultural artefact, the 16th century Mehmed Paša Sokolovic bridge, a graceful span of 11 masonry arches made legendary by the Yugoslav Nobel laureate Ivo Andric.

In his 1945 novel, the Bridge on the Drina, it is silent witness to atrocities across generations. In 1992, it was spattered with blood once more. Serb paramilitaries calling themselves "The Avengers" and the "White Eagles" went on a killing spree through the town and surrounding villages, executing Muslims. Men, women and over a hundred children were slaughtered, many on the bridge itself, and their bodies dumped in the Drina.

The practice of barricading people into houses and setting them alight with grenades was reproduced several times. In another incident in nearby Bikavac, there were 60 victims, against mostly women and children.

A couple of miles outside Višegrad, young women and girls as young as 14 were held captive and repeatedly raped in the Vilina Vlas spa hotel. It was where the paramilitaries led by a pair of sadistic local cousins, Milan and Sredoje Lukic, made their wartime base. Muslim men were routinely tortured next door to where the women were raped and killed.

The estimates of the total number of victims in the Višegrad municipality range from 1,600 to 3,000. The rest of the area's Muslims fled; most made their way south to Goražde, which became a Bosniak enclave and survived a three-year Serbian siege. Before the war, the Višegrad municipality had a population over 21,000, two thirds Muslim. Now the population is 12,000, 1,500 of them Bosniaks.

Today's survivors are post-war returnees to the Višegrad outskirts, often living in villages or houses where their loved ones were executed. Twenty years after the bloodletting they remain a marginalised community, routinely denied the meagre social benefits doled out by Višegrad's authorities.

After an interregnum in which slightly more moderate parties held sway, the Serb Democratic Party (or SDS for Srpska Demokratska Stranka) regained control of the municipality in October 2012. The extreme nationalist party of Radovan Karadzic, which hacked out the Republika Srpska and oversaw the "ethnic cleansing" of Muslims and Croats, is back in charge in Višegrad and 24 other Serb towns with its own version of what happened between 1992 and 1995, and its own way of doing things. Hence the municipal use of angle-grinders and bulldozers.

"With the old mayor we could co-operate much better. We had different opinions but it was discussed in a more civilised way," said Bilal Memiševic, the head of Višegrad's Islamic community council. Both his parents were murdered in 1992, when he was studying abroad. "Since the SDS came to power, they started ignoring us. They don't mention employment, or the economy. It's all about the war and the manipulation of 1992. They have been able to target a vulnerable population and they have been successful. They have built an alternative reality."

That alternative reality is visible everywhere in town. In the main square, there is large statue of a knight bearing a cross and a sword, dedicated to "the defenders of the Republika Srpska, with the gratitude of the people of Višegrad". Nearby a large swath of land had been expropriated for a literary theme-park, Andriægrad, masterminded by Emir Kusturica, Serbia's most famous film director, twice awarded the Palme d'Or at Cannes.

The complex, a pastiche on the town's history, due to be completed in June this year, is being built on the site of a former sports centre that was used as a detention camp by Serb paramilitaries.

In mid-March each year, hundreds of Serbs come from around the region to parade through the town to commemorate Draža Mihajlovic, the leader of the ultra-nationalist Chetnik movement during the second world war, who carried out a series of atrocities against Muslims in the Drina valley. They come as Chetniks, with long wild beards, fur hats, and black skull-and-crossbone flags. Many of the killers in 1992 dressed exactly the same way. It is a terrifying annual spectacle for Višegrad's remaining Bosniaks, all the more so in 2010 when Mitar Vasiljevic, a Lukiæ henchman sentenced 15 years by the Hague war crimes tribunal for his part in the 1992 killings, made a triumphant return after early release. He paraded in full Chetnik garb and was given a hero's welcome, complete with patriotic music and a motorcade through the town.

Milan Lukic himself was transferred from the Hague this month to serve his life term in Estonia. His cousin Sredoje is serving 27 years in Norway.

The most powerful man in town now is Miroslav Kojic, a soldier and secret policeman for Republika Srpska during the war and now Višegrad's SDS representative in the Republika Srpska parliament.

He provides a legal defence of the municipality's actions, arguing that there have been no convictions at the Hague tribunal specifically for genocide that would justify the disputed memorial. (Višegrad was taken from the list of municipalities in Karadzic's genocide indictment to slim the charge sheet and speed up his trial, but the tribunal has declared the town was subjected to "one of the most comprehensive and ruthless campaigns of ethnic cleansing in the Bosnian conflict"). As for Pionirska Street, Kojic says the issue is a long-running non-political town planning matter.

Of his own wartime role, Kojic – an energetic man with a piercing stare – is heated, launching into a strangely inverted version of Višegrad's wartime history, in which Bakira Hasecic supposedly tortured Serb policemen and soldiers, and Višegrad's Serbs withstood a brutal Bosniak siege in 1992 and 1993.

The narrative of Serb victimhood is pieced together from sporadic Bosniak acts of resistance during the war. After the former Yugoslav National Army bombarded Muslim areas of Višegrad at the outbreak of conflict in the first week of April 1992, a group of armed Muslims took some Serb policemen hostage and threatened to blow up a nearby hydroelectric dam if shelling continued. The dam was retaken by the army which then withdrew on May 19, handing the town over to Serb nationalists and paramilitaries that carried out the atrocities against Bosniak civilians.

In summer 1992, survivors of the concentration camps helped form a Bosniak First Višegrad Brigade which fought a guerrilla campaign for a year in the wooded hills on the west bank of the Drina, but never came close to surrounding or threatening the city before being driven back into the Bosniak enclave of Goražde in 1993. After surviving multiple rapes, Hasecic, did join the Bosnian army, but there is no evidence of her mistreating Serbs.

Today the Bosniak resistance effort is the justification for public memorials in central Višegrad for Serb soldiers and even Russian volunteer fighters on the Serb side, and the absence of equivalent monuments to Bosniak civilians. It is a pattern repeated around the Republika Srpska. Further up the Drina is the town of Foca which became a byword for mass rape during the war. Bosnian Serbs imprisoned Muslim women and girls and raped them on such a scale the town made legal history. As a result of what happened in Foca, such systematic rape was finally classed as a crime against humanity.

There is no sign of such a grim history in Foca now, just another granite and marble monument to the Serb fallen. There is also no plaque at the most notorious concentration camp at Omarska, now within an iron ore mine run by a Luxembourg-based multinational steel corporation, ArcelorMittal, which says it is a matter for the Serb-run local authority in Prijedor to decide. In the neighbouring camp, at Trnopolje, where torture and rape were rife and where hundreds of Bosniaks and Croats were killed, a concrete memorial to fallen Serb soldiers has been placed at the entrance inscribed with an ode to "freedom".

In Višegrad, the remaining Bosniaks have become accustomed to the official state of denial. Omar Bosankiæ and Elvedin Musanoviæ, two Muslim men in their mid-30s out strolling one recent afternoon on Višegrad's bridge, insist that relations with their Serb neighbours are fine as long as the war is not mentioned.

"No one wants to admit anything. They never want to talk about it," Bosankic said. As a 14-year-old boy, he helped fish bodies of murdered Muslims out of the Drina at night in his home village of Barimo, five miles downstream. "I still have images that come back all the time. There a woman with her hands tied behind her back and a man with a screwdriver still stuck in his neck."

Musanoviæ says that Bosniaks on the bridge were slaughtered with whatever the Lukics' "Avengers" or "White Eagles" could find, often blades of broken glass. A water tanker would come in the evening to wash away the gore from the ancient stones of the bridge where they now take their daily walk. In the absence of any jobs, there is not much else to do.

The two men are unimpressed by the municipality's legal objections to the Bosniak memorial.

"What else happened here but genocide?" Bosankic asked. Twenty-six people were murdered in his village in August 1992, the youngest, Emir Bajric, was only 12 years old. He points out that the fact that no one has so far been convicted for the crime does not mean it did not happen. "Everybody who lives here knows what happened."

**Good relations with Russia serve interest of Serbian people: Vucic (*Xinhua*, 23 March 2014)**

Deputy prime minister of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic said on Saturday that Serbia will "not take a hostile position towards Russia."

"Serbian position about the situation in Ukraine has to be responsible," Vucic said after meeting with the president of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik.

Vucic said that this attitude of Serbia does not mean balancing between Russia and the European Union.

He said that Serbian government has been under various influences, but it first has in mind the interests of its own citizens.

Dodik said that he understands Serbian position of neutrality.

**Opinions: To understand Putin, look to the past (*New York Times*, by Strobe Talbott, 22 March 2014)**

Strobe Talbott, president of the Brookings Institution, was deputy secretary of state in the Clinton administration.

In his speech Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin referred to Kosovo six times, bizarrely calling its independence a precedent for Russia’s annexation of Crimea . In fact, the two episodes could hardly be more different. No doubt Putin is fixated on Kosovo because its breakaway from Serbia fuels a deep-seated Russian phobia and sense of humiliation at the hands of the West in the 1990s.

Despite the end of the Cold War, Putin and many of his compatriots cling to the view that NATO remains fundamentally threatening to Russia. The alliance’s intervention in the Bosnian civil war confirmed that fear because its principal targets were Bosnian Serbs who were “ethnically cleansing” and massacring Bosnian Muslims. For many Russians, the Serbs were first and foremost fellow Orthodox Slavs, not to be seen as perpetrators of Europe’s first act of genocide since World War II but as religious and linguistic kin protecting their communities — and as victims of NATO.

In 1999, the dictatorial Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, frustrated by his inability to expand his country into the Serb-populated areas of Bosnia, turned his fury on the southern Serbian province of Kosovo. Much as Russians regard Ukraine as the cradle of their civilization, Serbs see Kosovo as hallowed ground, stained by the blood of their ancestors defeated by Ottoman invaders whose Albanian-speaking Muslim descendants make up the majority of modern Kosovo.

After diplomacy failed to stop Milosevic’s campaign of driving Kosovars out of their villages and slaughtering thousands in the process, NATO bombed Serbia for 78 days. Until this week, that period was, by far, the tensest in East-West relations since the end of the Cold War.

During frequent trips I made to Moscow at the time, I heard numerous Russians, including pro-Western reformers, lament that the post-Cold War spirit would not survive NATO’s pummeling of Belgrade. Some high-level officials accused NATO of practicing for a future bombardment of Moscow in support of secessionists in the restive Muslim-dominated region of Chechnya. That was the Kosovo precedent they could imagine.

To end the crisis, Russian President Boris Yeltsin sent an envoy, Viktor Chernomyrdin, to Belgrade to pressure Milosevic into withdrawing his troops from Kosovo and accepting an international peacekeeping force that would include Russian units under U.S. command so as not to be formally part of NATO.

In June 1999, I led a team from the State Department, White House and Pentagon to coordinate final plans for the operation. Soon after landing, we sensed trouble. Chernomyrdin was politically isolated. His military minder, Gen. Leonid Ivashov, was in virtual mutiny against the deal on joint Russian-NATO deployment.

Yeltsin, we were told, was “indisposed,” a word accompanied by knowing looks that translated as drunk. The civilian officials we met with were visibly unnerved at the possibility of a military coup.

The one exception was Putin, whom I met for the first time. As head of the Kremlin security council, he was on the first rung of the ladder he would climb quickly to the presidency.

In our meeting, he managed to seem both relaxed and on guard. He subtly but unmistakably put distance between himself and Chernomyrdin. His personal touches were pointed. For no reason other than to show he had read my KGB dossier, he dropped the names of two Russian poets I had studied in college.

During the meeting, my State Department colleague Victoria Nuland (now assistant secretary of state for Europe) passed me a note saying that Gen. Ivashov had just issued a threat to our Pentagon companions — who were in a meeting at the defense ministry — that the Russian army might break from NATO and deploy into Kosovo on its own, thereby turning what was supposed to be a collaborative operation into a confrontation.

When I read Nuland’s note aloud, Putin smugly waved it off and feigned puzzlement about who Ivashov was, which was patently implausible. His overall message was twofold: He knew details from my distant past but wasn’t going to let me know anything about what was happening in the here and now — or what would happen next.

Within hours, several small Russian units that had been monitoring the cease-fire in Bosnia dashed across southern Serbia into Kosovo, cheered as saviors by Serbs along the way.

The Russian foreign ministry issued a denial and then a lame statement about how the rogue operation was an accident. The Russian contingent hunkered down at an airfield outside the capital of Kosovo, while a multinational NATO force rolled in from Macedonia. What looked at first to be a mouse-that-roared farce turned dangerous when it appeared that the Russian military might airlift reinforcements and trigger a shooting war.

Yeltsin reemerged, none too steadily, in time to defuse the crisis and put the original deal back on track. Not until nine years later did Kosovo declare its independence. And, of course, it has not been annexed by Albania.

Putin’s role in that narrowly avoided military collision 15 years ago remains a mystery, but his attitude was clear then and relevant today. During a dangerous power vacuum in Moscow — when partnership between Russia and the West was at the breaking point; when Russian armed forces, fed up with having to make nice with NATO, took matters into their own hands and tried to rush to the aid of fellow Slavs — Yeltsin’s soon-to-be handpicked successor seemed to be relishing the moment.

**Republic of Macedonia – back to Yugoslavia? (*EurActiv.com*, 24 March 2014)**

The true goal of Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia Nikola Gruevski is not to join NATO and the EU, but to become part of Serbia or a new Yugoslavia, writes Miroslav Rizinski.

Miroslav Rizinski is a civil society activist, political observer and former political prisoner in the Republic of Macedonia (2007-2011), Board member of BKKS (Bulgarian Cultural Club – Skopje).

"It became clear recently that the foreign ministries of Serbia and Macedonia have concluded a treaty providing that the personal data and the police file of every Macedonian citizen could be made available to the former metropolis Belgrade even without a formal request. On top of this came the shocking statement by Nikola Gruevski, confirming the information of the Serbian Foreign Minister that joint diplomatic missions of the two countries are likely to be established worldwide.

These initiatives of the Macedonian Prime Minister, a former adviser to the Serbian government, should be seen in the context of his longstanding policy of re-yugoslavisation and antiquisation (helenisation) of the Republic of Macedonia. This policy has only been able to prevent Macedonia from joining the Euro-Atlantic family, and in fact preventing his country from joining NATO and the EU has been Gruevski’s main goal.

What other purpose could serve his "highly patriotic" project "Skopje 2014", described by most visitors as a megalomaniac and kitschy historic Disneyland? Was it designed to confirm what Greek bishop Karavangelis claimed a hundred years ago – that the majority of the population of Macedonia was composed of Greek Slavophones, direct descendants of Alexander the Great? By the way, at that time Karavangelis was quite unsuccessful in advocating this theory.

Nevertheless, Karavangelis has a now an excellent successor, since Gruevski is implementing the ideas of the Greek bishop in the today’s "free" Macedonia, at the expense of the Macedonian taxpayers. Thus Gruevski makes sure the Greek blockade of his country’s bid to join NATO and to begin EU accession negotiations is stronger as ever. And his interest is to use the blockade as an alibi for his undemocratic governance, for the violations of human rights and rule of law, the gross interference and control over the media, for undermining the multi-ethnic society and instigating hatred among people.

Simultaneously, the join celebration of Zebrenjak (marking the occupation of Vardar Macedonia by the Serbian Army) , the renewal of the old theatre "King Alexander I of Yugoslavia" and the Officers’ House (the headquarters where the terror against the Bulgarian population in Royal Yugoslavia was planned), the erection a statue of the Serbian King Dusan, the joint Serbo-Macedonian government meetings and police patrols in the city of Ohrid, along with many other events of such nature, prepare the Macedonian citizens for the idea of resuming a mini-Yugoslavia as an alternative to the Euro-Atlantic organizations.

But would one hundred thousand Macedonians with Bulgarian citizenship and their families be happy to be represented around the world by common Serbian-Macedonian embassies? Is this normal and how would the Serbian embassies be accepted by the Macedonian citizens of Albanian or other ethnic origin? The revolutionary fighters of IMRO are certainly turning in their graves, because the holy name of their organization is used by unscrupulous people for the purpose of such a “serbisation” and “re-yugoslavisation” of Macedonia [Gruevski’s party is also named IMRO-DPMNE].

The explanation that the main reason for merging the diplomatic missions is saving money is childish and only aims to conceal the true motives. There is no precedent in the world when different independent foreign policies have been generated from the same room!

During his rule, Gruevski was "successful" mainly in multiplying the number of the political prisoners and the political emigrants fleeing the country.

Instead of adequately addressing the hot issues of EU accession agenda, Mr. Gruevski's likely dreams for his old days appear to be to seek refuge and to spend the rest of his life in one of the envisaged joint embassies with the Republic of Serbia or the Republic of Srpska, based somewhere in Asia, Africa, South America or in any other remote part of the world.”

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