** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Wednesday, 26 March 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**Nikolic: Serbia continues insisting on truth and justice (*RTS*)**

“Serbia is a European country that is part of the European civilizational memory thanks to its culture and development through history, but it insists on truth and justice at all costs,” Serbian President Tomislav **Nikolic** said at an academy at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade, marking 15 years since the NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and ten years since the March pogrom against Kosovo Serbs. “There is no doubt that a connection exists between the two crimes, Nikolic said, adding that the NATO aggression made possible the barbarianism and rampage by ethnic Albanian extremists in Serbia’s southern province in 2004. “Kosovo and Metohija is no no-man’s land that anyone can attack if they want to. For centuries, it has been Serbia’s home, in which all people who respect each other in a reasonable and civilized manner can live if they are willing to. Serbia wants to reach an agreement, rather than fit into the standards of usurpers. Justice and law should be above anyone and equal for all. In your lifetimes, NATO bombed Serbia, a sovereign European state, for 78 days, without authorization from the Security Council and according to the law of force, not the law of justice. It bombed Serbia and its children. Be proud that, in those evil times, the Faculty of Law in Belgrade initiated direct correspondence with the world - it was a true counterstrike, but one that relied on legal and ethical arguments, and was generally seen as the first and major defeat for the aggressors and those who represented them. Fifteen years have passed since then, and some lessons are there for the world to learn. That is just how long it took the then German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to say aloud the truth he also knew back in 1999 - that the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was a violation of international law and that he himself trampled that law under foot. As slow as they may be, justice and truth are attainable. Schroeder spoke out a few days ago, someone else will tomorrow, and that will go on until the complete truth, strengthened by law and justice, becomes clear to the entire world,” he said. Nikolic also criticized the part of Europe that was unwilling to protect the European, rather than just Serbian, civilization and culture, promoting the ethnic Albanians’ right to a state in Serbian territory. Ten years ago, before the eyes of the entire world, a nation that had built monasteries, schools, hospitals and churches in the thousand years of history of its state and Orthodox Christianity in Kosovo and Metohija, was punished, while vandals who demolished, torched and tarnished the Serbian and European cultural memory are rewarded with impunity and expect to be given the ultimate reward of legalizing a state of their own in a territory where a state has existed for nearly a millennium - the Serbian state. There is valid, reliable documentation that corroborates the claim that Kosovo and Metohija is Serbian land, and sacred land, too. One of the fundamental rights that the world insists on is inviolability of property. Our documents on property in Kosovo and Metohija date back to the beginning of the 12th century. Our title deeds are etched in stone. It is not only Serbian, but European culture and memory that are treasured in Kosovo, as is a major step in the progress of the human civilization on the planet as a whole,” Nikolic said.

**Vulin: New arrests continuing pressure on Serbs in northern Kosovo (*Novosti*)**

Outgoing Minister in charge of Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar **Vulin** has stated that the arrests of attorneys Dejan **Vasic** and Faruk **Korenica** in Kosovska Mitrovica is the continuation of the pressure on Serbs in the north of the province, and he asked for their urgent release pending trial. I am afraid that the Serbs will completely lose their trust in EULEX, and that could have unforeseen consequences, Vulin stressed. He added that EULEX must understand the Serbs were not the enemies, the mission should do its work in line with the law and notify the Kosovo police service in the north about its actions, as well as to respect human rights. The breach into the attorney office and the search without the consent of the Attorney Bar, as well as the arrest that was made without notifying the Kosovo police in the north are making us cringe. We have to ask what is the purpose of the Kosovo police in the north of the province and if they were not notified only because there are Serbs in their ranks, Vulin underlined.

**Mayors from northern Kosovo: We will evict EULEX (*Tanjug*)**

The representatives of the municipalities in northern Kosovo have warned they will be forced to cancel the presence of EULEX in that area if the mission does not stop with the unilateral actions. The Serbs have blocked the road from Pristina to Raska in protest over the new arrests, and the mayor of Kosovska Mitrovica Goran **Rakic** has stated that by circumventing the Kosovo police in the north EULEX is bringing the purpose of that institution into question. We demand EULEX to immediately express the intentions over which they had detained some of the Serbs’ legal counselors and that they be released, along with all other detained Serbs, to prepare their defense pending trial, Rakic emphasized. The protest near Zvecan has gathered the mayors of all four municipalities in northern Kosovo, representatives of the interim municipal bodies and Head of the Mitrovica District Vasa Jelic.

**Zvecan: Serbs unblocked the road Pristina-Raska (*Tanjug*)**

The Serbs in northern Kosmet have unblocked the major road from Pristina to Raska, in the municipality of Zvecan, after having stopped the traffic for a few hours in protest over the new arrests of the Serbs in the province. The inhabitants of the village of Rudare had blocked the road after the apprehension of two attorneys in Kosovska Mitrovica, who had been representing many Serbs arrested in the previous months. The gathered officials have demanded EULEX to stop ignoring the institutions in northern Kosovo, and especially the regional command of the Kosovo police.

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**Lagumdzija lobbying for Ukraine (*Glas Srpske*)**

B&H Foreign Ministry has sent the B&H Presidency its position that it should vote for the adoption of the draft resolution of the UN General Assembly on Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, calling for a peaceful solution. B&H Foreign Minister Zlatko **Lagumdzija** informed about this the EU Special Representative to B&H Peter **Sorensen**, the ambassadors of France, the Czech Republic, Romania and the British charge d’affaires to B&H during talks on the situation in Ukraine. The Foreign Ministry stated that Lagumdzija reiterated that sovereign Ukraine and its peoples have the right to define their future independently, peacefully and in democratic dialogue. The final decision on B&H’s stand in regard to the adoption of the draft resolution of the General Assembly entitled “Territorial Integrity of Ukraine” should be adopted at the Presidency session scheduled for today. The cabinet of the Republika Srpska (RS) member in the B&H Presidency Nebojsa **Radmanovic** states that, if there is no consent, they will determine in what way the B&H representative will behave during the UN General Assembly session. Radmanovic earlier said that the B&H Presidency has not joined the EU statement on the political situation in Ukraine, because, during consultations, there had been no consensus among members of this body that is the only in the country that decides on the foreign policy and passes necessary decisions, reports ***Glas Srpske***.

**Kesic: Washington doesn’t want to deal with problems in B&H (*Nezavisne novine*)**

The head of the RS representative office in the U.S. Obrad **Kesic** said that, due to the Kosovo precedent and the events in Crimea, the West could no longer guarantee that borders in Europe will not change. He opines that there is an opportunity here for the RS and Serbia to be a bridge between the West and Russia on the one side, but also for better understanding to be created in the West for the position of the RS. “I don’t know how will everything end, but there is a possibility that the RS’ interest in a higher degree of independence and the restoration of the competences it has been deprived of could be more feasible now,” Kesic told ***Nezavisne novine.*** He, however, called for caution, pointing that the RS, B&H and Balkans should not become figures on a chessboard. Speaking about the U.S. policy towards B&H, Kesic says that B&H no longer attracts attention in the State Department and that it can be said that it has finally become a “normal” country, at least as far as the U.S. diplomacy is concerned. “There are expectations in Sarajevo that an outsider should be resolving problems in B&H. My experience in Washington over the past several years is that nobody wishes to deal seriously with the resolution of problems in B&H,” he stressed. Kesic doesn’t deny that there will always be interference from outside, but he is certain that there is no more return to the days when everything was imposed by the decisions of the high representative. “When ambassadors and diplomats arrive to these regions, they wish to interfere and become some political factor, but in today’s context, they can’t have anymore the influence they used to have.” Kesic reiterates that “there is definitely no unpacking of Dayton,” pointing that the key thing is that “no one any more advocates a highly centralized B&H,” and this is “mostly thanks to the efforts from the RS.” Kesic assessed that the joint functional state of B&H could be retained through federalism, or could even become a confederacy.

**Ohrid Citizen Accused of Terrorist Attack in Turkey (*Dnevnik/Kanal 5/Sitel/Telma/Alfa/MTV1/MIA*, 26 March 2014)**

A citizen of ethnic Albanian background from the Macedonian town of Ohrid, Muhamed **Zakiri**, is the third suspect for the terrorist attack which claimed the lives of two police officers and one civilian in the Nigde province in Turkey. Zakiri, along with two other residents of Kosovo had raided a police point and escaped, but he was arrested on Monday. The Islamic Albanian extremist group had told the police they carried out the attack in order to serve Allah. Before this, Zakiri, a Macedonian national aged 18, was learning at a Madrasa in Tirana. He left for Syria in 2011 to take part in Jihad for the first time and ever since he has been constantly travelling back and forth.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Serbia marks 15th anniversary of Nato strike (*Agence France-Presse*, 24 March 2014)**

BELGRADE Serbia marks on Monday the 15th anniversary since Nato launched an air war to stop the crackdown on independence-seeking Kosovo by the regime of strongman Slobodan Milosevic.

The 11-week operation was the Atlantic alliance’s first-ever major air campaign in Europe and still remains etched deep in Serbia’s public memory despite recent efforts by the government to move on.

On March 24 1999, Nato launched the attack — without UN Security Council backing — after Milosevic spurned a call to end repression by Serbian forces on ethnic Albanian guerrillas fighting for the independence of Kosovo.

For 78-days Nato aircraft bombed Serbian military and civilian targets throughout the country, including Kosovo and capital Belgrade, severely damaging infrastructure and killing at least hundreds. The civilian death toll has never been officially established and figures vary from 2,500 claimed by Serbian officials to 500 in a Human Rights Watch estimate.

The bombing ended on June 10 when Serbia agreed to withdraw its troops from the breakaway province. Kosovo was placed under UN administration, with Nato-led peacekeepers brought in to provide security.

In 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia and has so far been recognised by more than 100 countries, including the US and most of the European Union’s 28 member states.

Serbia, backed by Russia, fiercely refuses to recognise the secession, but has nevertheless moved to improve ties with Kosovo for the sake of integration with the European Union.

Having signed an EU-brokered agreement with Pristina on normalisation of relations, Serbia was awarded the opening of EU accession talks in January this year.

But even with eyes fixed on a Brussels-bound future, views of the 1999 bombings will always be strong in Belgrade.

In Serbia, the anniversary was to be commemorated by a series of events, including the opening of a Belgrade park in memory of 16 people killed in the controversial bombing of state broadcaster, RTS.

**The Break-Up of Yugoslavia (*The Huffington Post UK*, by John Wight, 25 March 2014)**

Fifteen years ago NATO launched an air war against the remaining territory of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia without either the approval of the UN Security Council or any basis in international law. Nineteen NATO member states were involved in a bombing campaign lasting 78 days. The Serbian Government estimated that 2,500 people were killed, with around 12,500 injured, while Serbia's infrastructure was decimated after schools, hospitals, airports, bridges, and other civilian targets were attacked from the air by F17 and F16 military aircraft and from the sea with cruise missiles.

The war was launched in response to Serbia's refusal to allow foreign troops on its territory on the basis of a decision taken at the Rambouillet Peace Conference in Paris prior to the bombing campaign in 1999. The conference had been organised to resolve the conflict between Serbia and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which led to the secession of Kosovo from Serbia and its eventual establishment as an independent state in 2008.

To understand the West's role in this conflict, the most brutal in Europe since the Second World War, it is important to understand something of the history of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and why its destruction was so important to the Western powers.

The six Balkan republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia were brought together after the Second World War in 1945 to form the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, a Croat who led the communist partisans against the Nazi occupation of the Balkans and the old monarchist kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Between 1960 and 1980 Yugoslavia enjoyed a period of sustained economic growth that funded its commitment to social and economic justice. Free health care and education was provided as a right for all its citiziens regardless of ethnicity, as was the right to work, a living wage, affordable housing and utilities, while most of its economy came under state ownership.

As a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement of nations that refused to be subsumed into either the Soviet or Western blocs during the cold war, Yugoslavia had influence and prestige on the international stage.Tito was an astute and a respected leader committed to the principle of self determination and to the forging of alliances with the world's developing nations for mutual advancement.

Yet despite Tito's refusal to be subsumed into the Soviet bloc, Yugoslavia remained safe from capitalist penetration while the Soviet Union existed as a countervailing force to US-led imperialism. As soon as the Soviet Union collapsed, however, this protective cloak was removed and the die was cast.

Fuelling the economic growth enjoyed by Yugoslavia during the '60s and '70s was its decision to borrow heavily from the West in order to invest in industry and the production of both export and consumer goods. This proved a disastrous course, as it rendered Yugoslavia's economy vulnerable to the fluctuations of global markets. As a result of the world recession of the 1970s, export markets contracted with the result that Yugoslavia's export production dried up along with its ability to service its debts. In response the IMF demanded a restructuring of Yugoslavia's economy to prioritise debt repayment. Stuck between the hammer of indebtedness and the anvil of continued borrowing in order to subsidise its commitment to the provision of education, health care, housing and social security for its citizens, by the late 1980s, the Yugoslav economy was in free fall.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, central banks moved in at the behest of policy-makers in Washington, London and Bonn. Determined to break up the last socialist country in Europe, they threatened to institute an economic blockade unless the Yugoslav government agreed to hold separate elections in each of its six republics. The passing of the US Foreign Operations Appropriations law 101-513 in 1991 contained a section relating specifically to Yugoslavia, stipulating that all loans, aid and credits would be cut off within six months unless elections were held.

Given the extent of US control over the IMF and the World Bank, this legislation was a de facto death sentence for the Yugoslav federal republic.

The most devastating provision of the law stipulated that only the forces within Yugoslavia deemed democratic by Washington would now receive loans from the US. Various right-wing factions in each of the six republics benefited directly from this provision and became the recipients of US largesse. It was a measure designed to bring to the fore and exacerbate differences along ethnic lines throughout the six republics that made up Yugoslavia and, in a climate of economic hardship, it was a measure which proved successful.

Germany recognised the secession of Croatia in 1991. Civil war ensued. It lasted for the next eight years until a three-month NATO campaign of air strikes against the recalcitrant Serbs, who'd refused from the outset to toe the line and acquiesce in the break-up of the federal republic, brought it to an end.

Led by Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian people were demonised for their refusal to bend the knee, with accusations of genocide and Nazi-like atrocities being levelled against their military forces and against their government. It should be noted that during the Second World War more Serbs were killed per capita than any other nationality fighting the Nazis.

After the war ended, Milosevic was arrested and charged with war crimes and genocide. As in any war, and certainly in fratricidal civil wars, atrocities are committed by all sides involved. Certainly, Serbian military forces did commit war crimes, most notably with the siege of Sarajevo and the massacre of Srebrenica in 1995, and it was right that those responsible were held to account. However the Serbian people found themselves on the losing side and as such at the sharp end of victors' justice relative to the justice received by various other factions and military forces involved in the fighting, particularly the KLA.

During Milosevic's trial in The Hague evidence of genocide against his government was never produced. This was despite the scouring of the countryside and towns and villages by international investigators searching for evidence in the form of mass graves and witnesses willing and able to corroborate such allegations. In fact, before his premature death, which remains shrouded in mystery, Milosevic had managed to turn proceedings in the International Criminal Court into a trial of his accusers, successfully exposing their role and culpability in the break-up of his country.

As for the former Yugoslavia, with its collapse came the inevitable shock therapy in the form of the privatisation of all public services, utilities and state-run industries and, like a pack of rabid and hungry dogs around a carcass, the arrival of global corporations.

As night follows day, this resulted in severe economic hardship and the scourge of unemployment, which led directly to the dislocation of communities, mass migration to the West and, on the back of all this, the rise of criminal gangs involved in people trafficking, the sex and drugs trades and other illegalities.

Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008 completed the process of the break-up of a nation founded as a vision of brotherhood, peace and unity in a region of the world traditionally beset by war and strife.

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