** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Friday, 28 February 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**Djuric: Formation of Union of Serb Municipalities crucial for Serbia (*RTS*)**

The formation of the Union of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo and Metohija is the next step following the formation of the government in northern Kosovska Mitrovica. Serbian President’s advisor Marko **Djuric** told the morning news of ***Radio and Television of Serbia*** (RTS) that Serbia and Serb municipalities in Kosovo and Metohija would do everything towards completing timely our part of the job. “As far as we are concerned there will be no obstacles. As far as the performance of the Albanian political factor in Kosovo and Metohija is concerned, we have no influence on this. We are focused on municipalities being formed and forming the Union as soon as possible, and it is on the Pristina representatives to enable this process to smoothly develop,” said Djuric. “We think it would not be acceptable for Pristina to try to slow down or obstruct the formation of the Union in any way, nor would this be allowed. Following the great victory at the elections in northern Kosovska Mitrovica, prerequisites for forming the Union have been created and we can expect work on this very soon,” said Djuric. According to him, the formation of the Union is the key moment for Serbia and continuation of our survival in Kosovo and Metohija. “The fact that a candidate who is a member of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) won at these elections in northern Kosovska Mitrovica speaks that the people are firmly resolved to form the Union of Serb Municipalities,” said Djuric. “I don’t think that anyone in Pristina can stop this,” said Djuric. In the meantime, the Serbian Constitutional Court has passed a decision that the decree on the cadastre for Kosovo is non-constitutional. The previous government has passed a decree that the Constitutional Court assessed as non-constitutional. The decisions of the Constitutional Court are final and executive and Serbia will respect the court’s decision, says Djuric. “At the same time, this government will try to approach this matter in the most responsible manner, in the sense of passing decrees with which the Constitutional Court will not have any problems,” says Djuric. According to him, the problem is the manner in which the decree was passed.

**Veselinovic under house arrest (*Tanjug*)**

Zarko **Veselinovic**, one of the four Serb detainees in Kosovo and Metohija, has been placed under house arrest, attorney Dejan A. **Vasic**, a member of his defense team, said on Friday. The decision has been delivered by EULEX judge Nuno **de Madureira**, based on the Serbian government’s guarantees, as the court ascertained that they reduce the danger of flight, Vasic told ***Tanjug***. The EULEX police arrested Veselinovic in Rudare, the municipality of Zvecan in northern Kosovo, in July 2013, and in November he faced a suspended sentence of nine months for illegal possession of weapons. Veselinovic is still in custody on suspicion of attempted murder of two members of the ROSU Kosovo special police unit. However, a EULEX judge extended Oliver **Ivanovic’s** detention for two months on Thursday. The other two Serbs are Dragoljub **Delibasic**, former police chief in Kosovska Mitrovica, and Laza **Lazic** from Strpce. Ivanovic and Delibasic were arrested on suspicion of involvement in an alleged war crime in 1999 and post-war incidents in 2000, including an aggravated murder, and for inciting to ethnically motivated murder.

**SDP Civic Initiative requests Serbian government to freeze Brussels talks (*RTS*)**

Members of the SDP Civic Initiative requested the Serbian government to freeze the talks in Brussels until the guarantees offered for the Serbs are not accepted, the release notes. At the same time, the SDP urges the court in Pristina to consider Ivanovic’s complaint against the extension of detention for 60 days. The SDP members also noted that they are shocked at the injustice that is being demonstrated toward one of the most distinguished Serbs, and Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija in general. Suspected criminals and offenders that are not Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija are allowed house arrest and release pending trial, while these rights do not exist for the Serbs facing fabricated accusations, the release reads. On Thursday, the pre-trial judge of the Basic Court in Kosovska Mitrovica decided to extend the detention on remand for Ivanovic for two months, at the request of the Kosovo Special Prosecution Office, and offered the argument that there is the risk of flight and the risk that the defendant might influence witnesses.

**Constitutional Court annulled decree on cadastre for Kosovo (*Politika*)**

The Serbian Constitutional Court has assessed as non-constitutional the Decree on the cadastre for Kosovo that is based on the Brussels agreement. Thus, the Court has given once again six months to the Serbian government to organize the Decree on the cadastre as prescribed by the Serbian Constitution. “The Constitutional Court has started with this decision to perform its job of protecting the constitutional order of Serbia. Even though at issue is one decree, and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) submitted several proposals to the Constitutional Court to annul all Brussels agreements, this decision of the Constitutional Court is of great importance. There is no greater national interest for Serbia than protecting the Constitution and preventing Albanian separatists from creating their state on the territory of our country,” reads the DSS statement. The DSS voiced expectation that the Constitutional Court declares as soon as possible all Brussels agreement non-constitutional and thus protects the constitutional order and Kosovo and Metohija. The Constitutional Court brought the decision in June last year to stop with the procedure on assessing the constitutionality of this decree (on the special manner of processing data contained in the land cadastre for the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija). With this decision the Court has given the government the opportunity to harmonize this decree with the Constitution. Namely, the government had the opportunity to remove the decree from the legal order or to amend it in such a way so it is in accordance with the Constitution, laws and international conventions. Since the Serbian government hasn’t done any of those things, the Constitutional Court resumed the procedure of assessing constitutionality and passed the final decision as a session on 26 February. There are three more government decrees before the Constitutional Court that were passed based on the Brussels agreement, and one of them is the decree on registry books. At the end of last September, the Constitutional Court decided to stop with the procedure of assessing the constitutionality and legality of the Decree on the special manner of processing data in registry books for the region of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. In this case too, the Serbian government was given the opportunity to harmonize the decree with the Constitution, within six months, and this deadline expires at the end of March. In December 2012, the Serbian parliament Committee for constitutional issues and legislature sent a note to the Constitutional Court with the proposal to stop with the procedure because “underway is the drafting of the law that will regulate the essential autonomy of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija” in accordance with the Constitution. The Serbian government and the Minister of Justice both addressed the Constitutional Court with the request to stop with the procedure of assessing the constitutionality of the disputed decree and the request to “give an opportunity for this to be organized in a manner prescribed by the Constitution.” Now the Constitutional Court is expected to pass the final decisions on all disputable decrees, i.e. to assess them as non-constitutional, just as in the case with the decree on the cadastre, and to annul other decrees passed based on the Brussels agreement if the Serbian government doesn’t harmonize them with the Constitution.

**Constitutional Court decision in effect only within six months (*Danas*)**

The Serbian Constitutional Court told ***Danas*** that the decision regarding the Decree on the cadastre for Kosovo is formal; politicians estimate differently its consequences, while constitutional law experts and the DSS expect a new legal confusion that is following the Belgrade-Pristina agreements. “The reason for establishing the non-constitutionality and illegality of the disputed Decree is formal and legal, because the Constitutional Court assessed that matters prescribed by the Decree cannot be the subject of a bylaw, but must be prescribed by the law. That is why the publication of the decision has been postponed, so to give the opportunity to remove within six months the reasons for non-constitutionality and illegality by legally prescribing the mentioned issues. For this reason, there was no ground at all for the Court to start assessing the content of certain decrees,” the Serbian Constitutional Court told ***Danas***. Professor of constitutional law and former judge of the Serbian Constitutional Court Zoran **Ivosevic** tells ***Danas*** that the request for the laws and actions stemming from the Decree to be abolished will be able to be renewed if a law that would strengthen the content of the disputed decree is not passed before the publication of the decision of the Serbian Constitutional Court. Ivosevic notes that the Brussels agreement and the agreement on its implementation are special cases in the Serbian Constitutional Court, before which there are seven more government decrees stemming from the Belgrade-Pristina negotiations to be assessed for constitutionality. Our interlocutor also points to the legal confrontation between the Serbian government decrees that mention provisional institutions of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, which are not contained in the Brussels agreement, because with this document “Belgrade accepted for Kosovo and Metohija to be integrated into the constitutional-legal system of the self-declared Kosovo state.” The DSS says that “there is no dilemma that the Serbian Constitutional Court declared the Decree on the cadastre non-constitutional and that it could be harmonized with the Serbian Constitution and laws through the announced constitutional laws on the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija.” The problem is, the DSS claims, that the Brussels agreement and the EU will not allow Belgrade to pass a law that would bind the future Union of Serb Municipalities into the Serbian constitutional and legal order. “The assessment of the Serbian Constitutional Court will not influence the Brussels process and the implementation of the Brussels agreement. There is no turning back, nor should it be. Executive organs must respect the decision of the Serbian Constitutional Court and find a solution that will harmonize the Decree with the Constitution and laws, which is the job of the Justice Ministry,” SNS official Milovan **Drecun** told ***Danas***. Goran **Bogdanovic**, an official of the New Democratic Party and former minister for Kosovo and Metohija during whose mandate the disputable decree was passed, didn’t wish to comment the position of the Serbian Constitutional Court. Bogdanovic told Danas that the Court’s assessment must be respected and opines that it will influence, though not crucially, the future of the Brussels agreement.

**Agreement on postal traffic with Pristina (*Novosti*)**

Belgrade and Pristina could soon establish regular postal traffic, ***Novosti*** has learned. That is one of the results of yesterday’s talks between the two delegations’ chambers of commerce that met in Paris towards implementing the agreement from the technical dialogue, based on the April agreement in Brussels. The representatives of two chambers of commerce are conducting talks on free traffic of goods and services, railway and postal traffic, and they reached yesterday an initial agreement on technical details for establishing postal traffic that will be defined in the coming weeks with an annex of the agreement. This agreement is signed with the European Chamber of Commerce, under whose auspices these talks are being held, and through which all agreements are legally and technically defined. Consequently, post could start arriving in the next month or so. The two delegations have been meeting regularly over the past period, each month in some of the European capitals – Budapest, Brussels and Podgorica, and the next should be held in Athens and London. So far, they signed annexes regarding trade arbitrage and exchange of representatives.

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**Dodik: Serbs will never observe 1 March as holiday (*Srna*)**

The Republika Srpska (RS) President Milorad **Dodik** says 28 February 28 and 1 March will never be the dates that Serbs will celebrate as holidays in any way whatsoever. “We all know what happened after the 1992 referendum and the very memory of those dates can reopen old wounds and create an even bigger impression that certain forces have not stopped abusing, utilizing and promoting those dates,” Dodik told a press conference in Banja Luka on Thursday.
“They are equally traumatic for the Serbs, who lost the common state, and also for the Croats and Bosniaks, who, after those days and the political decisions on independence and breakup, and violent secession carried out by Alija Izetbegovic and his political followers, without respecting the Serb people’s stance, did what they did, causing a dramatic outcome and deaths of people in the whole territory of B&H,” Dodik emphasized. That is exactly why 28 February, the day certain organizations have scheduled protests for in the RS, seems provocative for many true patriots and veterans, he said. Protest organizers have the right to choose any date they want, but it is not by accident that they have chosen 28 February, the date B&H was conducting its referendum, and that after that comes the date when the Bosniaks celebrate the “independence day” and the separation from Yugoslavia, when the bloodshed began, he said. “That referendum was definitely a referendum of outvoting and not respecting the will of the Serb people. And that’s why to choose that day for protests is upsetting, and I don’t mean to insult anyone who was a true fighter for the RS’ cause,” said Dodik. He added it was particularly upsetting that it was done by war veterans, who allowed themselves to be manipulated and be part of broad manipulation.

**Poposki: Brussels agreement improved relations between Macedonia and Serbia (*Politika*)**“Two open issues between Serbia and Macedonia – the status of the canonically non-recognized Macedonian Orthodox Church and different visions on Kosovo – pointed to by Prime Minister Ivica Dacic last year – have been changed in the meantime only partially,” Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola **Poposki** told ***Politika***. He stated further that there are still obstacles before the Serbian Orthodox Church to recognize the Macedonian Church. Poposki considers that the development of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and signing the Brussels agreement influenced the relaxation of Serbia’s relations towards Macedonia.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Serbian deputy PM condemns arrests of Serbs (*Xinhua*, 27 February 2014)**

PRISTINA -- Serbian Deputy Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vucic paid a visit to Kosovo on Thursday, condemning the recent arrests of local Serbs.

In the most northern Kosovo town of Leposavic, overwhelmingly inhabited by Serbs, Vucic said that the release of arrested people is the first topic in the next meeting in early March with Pristina authorities in Brussels, as part of EU-brokered dialogue. Four Serbs, including the prominent Serb local leader from Mitrovica, Oliver Ivanovic, have been arrested in recent weeks on war crime charges by EU Rule of law mission (EULEX) and Kosovo police.

Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in 2008, but Belgrade does not recognize the secession.

"The arrest of our people 12 or 15 years after the alleged committed crimes, shows that someone is afraid of the Serbian unity", said Vucic in a public addressing in Leposavic.

Vucic also visited Banjska monastery in northern Kosovo on Thursday and pledged to help renovate the sanctity.

The government will provide assistance to the restoration of the monastery, Vucic said.

**Hateful Message on Kosovo Church Condemned (*BIRN*, 27 February 2014)**

An anti-Serbian slogan scrawled on the walls of a church in Kosovo has been condemned by a local priest.

A slogan reading "The only good Serb is a dead Serb" has appeared in Albanian on the walls of a Serbian Orthodox Church in the Kosovo town of Gjakova.

Sava Janjic, Archdeacon of the nearby Decani Monastery in Kosovo, has condemned the message.

The church was destroyed in the 2004 March riots in Kosovo when hundreds of ethnic Albanian protestors clashed with Serbs and attacked their homes. Four years after, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia.

**Kosovo and Montenegro Close to Border Deal (*BIRN*, by Edona Peci, 27 February 2014)**

About two years after Kosovo and Montenegro started talks on border demarcation, the two foreign ministers say an agreement will be signed soon.

Enver Hoxhaj, the Foreign Minister of Kosovo, said the process of finalising the border with Montenegro would soon be completed, “maybe by mid-summer”.

Hoxhaj made his upbeat comments in Pristinaafter signing a memorandum on general cooperation with his Montenegrin counterpart, Igor Luksic.

Lukic agreed. “Nintey-five per cent of the work has already been done on the demarcation of the border with Kosovo," he said.

"We are in the phase of resolving some cadastral issues in order to clarify where all the check-points will be set,” he added.

Kosovo and Montenegro started consultations on signing an agreement on border demarcation in 2012.

The government in Podgorica recognized Kosovo’s independence in 2008, much to the anger of Serbia and of Serbs in Montenegro. Serbia maintains that Kosovo is a province of Serbia, though the two countries have recently agreed to "normalise" relations.

Montenegro's ambassador to Serbia was asked to leave and it took a year before full diplomatic relations between the two countries resumed.

However, Kosovo and Montenegro have yet to open embassies in each other's capitals.

Recognition of the existence of a Montenegrin community in Kosovo has been one of the conditions set by the Montenegrin government before it will send an ambassador to Pristina.

At the end of 2011, Kosovo amended the law on communities to recognize the Montenegrin community, but authorities in Podgorica insist that the rights of the Montenegrins in Kosovo must be guaranteed in the constitution of Kosovo as well.

Hoxhaj has meanwhile said will send a request to open an embassy in Montenegro “tomorrow”.

Lukic was more cautious, stressing the need for Kosovo “to offer the same rights for the Montenegrin community as all other communities” before it will do likewise.

**US Blames Serb Hardliners for North Kosovo Violence (*BIRN*, by Edona Peci, 28 February 2014)**

As Pristina and Belgrade strive to normalize relations between each other, a US State Department report said Serb hardliners had tried to block those efforts in northern Kosovo.

The Human Rights Practices Report for 2013 published this week by the State Department said: “Important human rights problem during the year centered on Kosovo Serb hardliners’ efforts to block normalization, including establishing roadblocks in the northern part of the country and restricting basic rights such as freedom of movement of persons and goods.”

The State Department also blamed hardliners for the killing of an EU rule-of law mission custom officer, Audrius Senavicius, last September.

“Hardliners and criminal elements employed violence and intimidation against domestic opponents and international security forces,” it noted.

Since the conflict in Kosovo ended in the late 1990s, the north of the country has been beyond the Kosovo government's control while Serbia has continued to finance local security, judicial, health and educational institutions.

Kosovo declared independence in 2008 but Serbia refuses to recognize it. However, both sides are now conducting an EU-facilitated dialogue aiming to "normalize" relations.

On April 19, 2013, Pristina and Belgrade adopted a draft agreement, which mainly concerned the position of Serbs in the north.

Under the agreement, an Association of Serbian Municipalities with broad powers is to be set up, including the four Serb-run northern municipalities of North Mitrovica, Leposavic, Zvecan and Zubin Potok.

Local elections held in November throughout Kosovo then produced new mayors for the northern Serbian municipalities.

But many people in the north boycotted the November 3 2013 vote and masked men attacked some polling stations on the Serb side of the divided northern town of Mitrovica, causing some of them to close early.

“While both the Kosovo and Serbian governments encouraged voter participation, hardliners urged a boycott, and assailants attacked three polling stations in the north in Zvecan “, the US report noted.

Other general human rights problems in Kosovo, according to the State Department, included “reported police mistreatment of detainees; inmate-on-inmate violence, corruption, and favoritism in prisons; substandard physical conditions in prisons; lengthy pretrial detention and judicial inefficiency; intimidation of the media by public officials and criminal elements; restrictions on religious freedom and vandalism on religious grounds”.

The report also noted “limited progress in returning displaced persons to their homes... government corruption; anti-Semitic rhetoric; trafficking in persons; poor conditions in mental health facilities; sporadic ethnic tensions in the north; and child labor in the informal sector".

Bosnia protesters push for change as economy tanks

Luigi Serenelli and Dino Jahic, Special for USA TODAY 7:22 p.m. EST February 27, 2014Most citizens blame politicians for the stagnant economy as Bosnia and Herzegovina's unemployment rate tops 44%.

A Bosnian boy holds a placard reading "Europe, You Owe Us, Dont You Remember 92-95 (referring to the war)," while citizen rights activists gather in front of Bosnia and Herzegovina's presidency building to block traffic at one of the busiest intersections in Sarajevo on Feb. 21, 2014.(Photo: Elvis Barukcic, AFP/Getty Images)

**Demonstrations follow years of political promises to improve Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy (*USA Today*, 28 February 2014)**

*Analysts say peace agreement has kept country Balkanized, restrained growth; Nation can't join EU until it changes laws that allow only Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs to hold federal office*

As protests continue in Bosnia and Herzegovina, many citizens press for change, saying the unrest reflects mounting frustrations at a dysfunctional political system and a failing economy that is a product of a flawed peace agreement signed nearly 20 years ago.

The protests — which have brought the worst unrest to the nation since the end of the Bosnian War — began this month in Tuzla, a badly depressed industrial area in the north of the country. Demonstrations spread to the capital, Sarajevo, where rioters set fire to the presidential building and trashed the city center last week.

"Our lives are miserable," said Emir Hodzic, 36, of Sarajevo. "Pensions are not enough to pay the bills. People are literally hungry. Young people have no future.

"And we have had 20 years of transition — transition from what to what?" he said. "Things have never been worse."

In some areas, protests have been put on hold this week as demonstrators set up citizens' assemblies to press for change.

"I call on politicians to not to ignore the voices of citizens," EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule said this week.

Their economy on the decline, the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina have decided to step up, said Alida Vracic, executive director of the Think Tank Populari in Sarajevo. Protesters are electing leaders who they expect will begin negotiations with the country's leaders in the coming weeks.

"For the first time, people see that they have to take power in their hands," Vracic said. "The political elite feels fear and is insecure about its position for the first time in 20 years."

The eruption has followed years of political promises to improve Bosnia-Herzegovina's economy, where problems stemming from communist rule through the early 1990s are still rampant.

"There have been 20 years of really badly managed privatization policies," Vracic said. "Companies are broken down and cannot be easily restructured."

Citizens blame politicians for the stagnant economy as the country's unemployment rate tops 44%.

"It was a matter of time when something like this would happen. I even expected it would be worse, when you take into account how wrong everything is," said Eldin Hasanagic, 33, a graphic designer who hopes the government will resign. "The same people are holding power all the time. They don't do anything, but they do get incredibly large salaries. In two months, they earn more than I do in a year."

Politicians operate in a system that might not grant them the power to change much, analysts say.

The Dayton peace agreement signed in 1995 at the end of nearly four years of ethnic wars, which killed more than 100,000 people, was a milestone for peace efforts in Europe. Almost two decades later, the peace agreement has lost its luster, and critics say the political system it created has kept the county Balkanized, as well as restrained economic growth.

Bosnia-Herzegovina's central government is divided by a power-sharing agreement between Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs who don't always cooperate with each other.

"The political system revolves around these three groups, and the ethnic component is still influential," said Theresia Toeglhofer, an analyst at the German Council of Foreign Relations who specializes in the western Balkans. "Decision-making is very difficult because the political leadership is divided along ethnic lines."

Outside the central government, the country is divided into two entities, the Serb Republic — which has its own president and maintains separate foreign relations with Serbia to the east — and the Bosnian Federation, which is divided into 10 cantons (counties) with high degrees of independence.

The many layers of government curb economic development because no one is in charge, said Dusan Reljic of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin. He isn't sure if anyone actually wants to be in charge.

"The constitutional order is extremely difficult to handle," he said. "Croats and Serbs don't identify much with this Bosnia-Herzegovina state while Bosniaks see themselves as the main nation of the country. They stay in the same country because of western, first of all American, pressure. But they don't think really that it was a good idea, mainly from the United States, to keep Bosnia together."

Dysfunctional government keeps the country from improving ties with the European Union, its best hope for prosperity.

In 2011, the EU and Bosnia-Herzegovina signed an agreement that spells out their relationship, including the changes Bosnia would need to enact to join the EU. Before that agreement can take effect, EU officials demand that the ethnically divided central government change laws that allow only Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs to hold federal office.

The laws were ruled illegal in 2009 after Jewish and Roma plaintiffs challenged them in the European Court of Human Rights.

Bosnia-Herzegovina lawmakers have proposed electoral changes that are under review. In the meantime, the slow EU-integration process has had devastating consequences.

"Bosnia failed to adopt EU export standards and now is not able to export products, especially animal products, to Croatia," Toeglhofer said. "It is losing a lot because Croatia, now an EU member (since 2013), is one of the most important trading partners for Bosnia."

The United States is pulling back diplomatically from the region as memories of the Yugoslav wars fade, Reljic said.

"The U.S. has been always seen as the ally of Bosnia and Muslims," he said. "However, in the last couple of years, the U.S. has not shown very much interest in what is going on."

Serenelli reported from Berlin.

**Bosnian Serb Leader Slates Veterans' Protest (*BIRN*, by Elvira M. Jukic, 27 February 2014)**

Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik said planned protests by war veterans in Banja Luka were aimed at destabilizing the entity.

Dodik said that the protests announced for Friday were targeted against Republika Srpska and aimed to destabilize it.

Speaking in Banja Luka on Thursday, he said it was no accident that the protests were planned for February 28 - the day when Bosnians voted in a referendum 22 years ago to separate themselves from Yugoslavia - against the will of the Serbs.

Dodik said the referendum notoriously “did not respect the will of the Serbian people... which is why choosing that day for the day of protests is disappointing”.

He said it was a provocation to honest fighters for the Serbian entity that such protests would concide with Bosnia's independence day, which was, Dodik said, the day when the bloodshed in Bosnia in the 1990s started.

Several hundred veterans of the Republika Srpska army have announced they will gather in the centre of Banja Luka to draw attention to their tough lives and demand the dismissal of the leadership of the entity's veterans' association.

Some of the former soldiers said their own humiliating lives contrasted sharply with those of war profiteers.

“We were the ones who created Republika Srpska and today we are watching them destroy it bit by bit,” one veteran told the media.

“While they enlarge their bank accounts, fleets of vehicles and build villas, they make welfare cases out of us and our children,” he added.

Some of the veterans who plan to protest on Friday gathered in a park in Banja Luka on Thursday. There, they said they expected at least 2,000 people on the streets, although many would probably fear to come out and complain.

But Dodik said that those who planned to go out to protest in Banja Luka had been manipulated.

Earlier, he said that the street protests in the Federation entity also aimed to destabilize Republika Srpska - even though the protesters' main issues were social injustice, failed privatization schemes and corrupt political elites.

A small protest in Banja Luka, which echoed the much bigger rallies in the Federation, appeared to provide an argument for the Bosnian Serb authorities to claim that the real aim of the movement was to destabilize Republika Srpska.

**Exclusive: Mole Who Met Bin Laden Killed by Al Qaeda in Bosnia (*NBC News*, by Richard Esposito, 27 February 2014)**

An FBI mole who provided valuable intelligence on al Qaeda and met with Osama bin Laden was lured away from the FBI to work for the CIA, but was killed by al Qaeda operatives in Bosnia who suspected he was an informant,

The informant, a Sudan-born driver and confidante to “Blind Sheikh” Omar Abdel-Rahman, the radical Muslim cleric who allegedly masterminded the first attempt to take down the World Trade Center, had been the sole human asset providing first-person information about al Qaeda in the mid-1990s as the terror group gained strength around the globe.

According to sources familiar with the management of the mole, the FBI recruited him in 1993 because he was a known associate of the Blind Sheikh.

Ted ThaiSheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, the alleged mastermind of the first World Trade Center bombing.

The Egyptian-born Sheikh had been an FBI target since at least Nov. 5, 1990, when one of his followers, El Sayyid Nosair, shot and killed radical Rabbi Meir Kahane in a Manhattan hotel. After the shooting, boxes of information were found in Nosair’s apartment that hinted at a larger conspiracy.

Under pressure, the Sheikh moved some of his operations from the New York area to Los Angeles, where the future mole was living. The mole became the Sheikh’s driver. That’s when the FBI first noticed him, and started the process that would turn him into an informant.

In early 1993, the Immigration and Naturalization Service tipped the FBI to the driver’s identity, and the FBI found that he was on a terrorism watch list. The INS then tried to deport the driver, only to discover that the driver’s status as a possible Islamic militant made it hard to find a country that would accept him.

Jordan agreed to take him, but then threw him in jail for three months. The driver wound up in Yemen, where the FBI began to reel him in.

Though the chronology is unclear, by around this time terrorists had mounted their first attack on New York’s World Trade Center. On Feb. 26, 1993, a truck filled with 1,500 pounds of explosive detonated in an underground garage, killing six people but failing to take down the twin towers.

The FBI increased its focus on the Sheikh and his associates, who were suspected of involvement. In Yemen, the FBI agent who would later become the driver’s handler – Bassem Youssef, the bureau’s highest ranking Arabic speaker – made his first approach. According to sources, he introduced himself to the driver not as an agent, but as a friend who could help reunite the driver with his family in California, via personal connections with an important L.A. judge.

The bureau also obtained warrants to listen to phone calls to and from the driver’s home, including conversations with the Sheikh. And it began to work on the driver’s wife, who became a cooperating source.

The driver, however, still didn’t know he was talking to the FBI. But after subsequent meetings with Youssef and other agents in Rome and Brussels, he learned the truth, and agreed to provide information, said sources. He started talking about a terror group called al Qaeda. In Brussels, he passed a polygraph test, and then produced a dozen authentic U.S. and Canadian passports in which the original pictures had been replaced with the pictures of al Qaeda operatives. The operatives had used the passports to crisscross Europe and spread the message of jihad.

The driver was also able to arrange a trip to his home country of Sudan for a meeting with one of the Sheikh’s associates, a little-known Saudi-born terror leader named Osama bin Laden.

“Bin Laden was not bin Laden then,” said one Justice Department official. “He was not that hard to get to.”

In Sudan, bin Laden told the mole that he had “picked out” a Masonic Lodge in Los Angeles for an “explosion.” The mole also told the FBI that the Sheikh said, “If you need any money, you go to Osama directly and tell him I sent you.” It is not known whether the source tried to solicit funds from bin Laden.

Back in the U.S., the Blind Sheikh was arrested along with nine followers on June 24, 1993. He was later convicted of conspiracy for planned attacks on American landmarks, and sentenced to life in prison.

The informant continued working for the FBI after the Sheikh’s arrest, said sources. But the mole’s success had piqued the interest of another U.S. agency, the CIA. In 1994, a civilian female working for the CIA was able to convince the informant, with the help of a large sum of money, to work for the CIA instead of the FBI.

In 1994 or 1995, the CIA dispatched the informant to Bosnia, where jihadis were aiding Bosnia’s Muslim majority in a war against Serbian forces.

The FBI did not know at the time that its informant had started working for the CIA, or why he had disappeared. His former handler, Bassem Youssef, who by then was working undercover in Los Angeles as a supposed member of al Qaeda, began asking his al Qaeda sources what had become of the driver.

They told Youssef that the driver had gone to Bosnia, and that al Qaeda operatives there had killed him because they believed that he was a mole for the CIA. Later, Youssef was able to confirm that the al Qaeda operatives’ suspicions were justified, and that the driver had been working for the CIA.

The existence of the informant was first revealed during courtroom testimony in 2010, as part of a discrimination suit filed by Bassem Youssef against the FBI. Youssef accused the bureau of passing him over for promotion despite his skills.

Testifying on Youssef’s behalf, former assistant special agent in charge of the FBI’s L.A. office Ed Curran revealed that Youssef had developed the Blind Sheikh’s driver as an informant.

“It was the only source I know in the bureau where we had a source right in al Qaeda, directly involved,” Curran told the court, according to excerpts of testimony published by the Washington Times. He also testified that the informant was “tight, close” with al Qaeda leadership.

The Washington Times was the first media outlet to report on Curran’s revelation, and noted that the bureau had declined to tell the 9/11 Commission, which investigated al Qaeda’s 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, about the al Qaeda informant’s existence.

Sources told NBC News, however, that they weren’t sure the informant was relevant to the 9/11 Commission, because by 2001 his short, albeit productive, relationship with the U.S. government – and his life – had been over for six years.

In a statement, the FBI said that the FBI “made all relevant information available to the 9/11 Commission.”

The CIA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Bassem Youssef is still with the FBI and continues to pursue his discrimination suit.

**Macedonia Albanians Demand Early Elections (*BIRN*, by Sinisa Jakov Marusic, 28 February 2014)**

The junior partner in Macedonia’s ruling coalition has demanded early general elections after its senior partner, VMRO DPMNE, rejected the idea of a mutually agreed presidential candidate.

The ethnic Albanian Democratic Union for Integration, DUI, on Thursday said it would submit a call for early general elections to parliament.

The main ruling VMRO DPMNE wasted no time before calling an emergency party session for Friday to discuss the issue.

“We are only waiting for the Prime Minister [and VMRO DPMNE head] Nikola Gruevski to arrive back to the country for the session,” the party told Balkan Insight.

The DUI move surprised few, as the DUI was expected to seek snap polls after VMRO DPMNE ignored its proposal for a joint presidential candidate that would represent both Macedonians and ethnic Albanians.

Earlier this week, many leading VMRO DPMNE figures urged the current President, Gjorge Ivanov, to run for a second five-year term, despite the DUI’s stated objections.

If parliament dissolves and early elections are called, which many now see as likely, opinion polls suggest that VMRO DPMNE and the DUI stand to do best.

The main opposition Social Democratic Party has, however, said that it would support a vote in favour of early elections.

“Early elections do not depend on us. But if the ruling coalition partners continue to play a game of making alibis for elections, then that’s it,” Petre Silegov, the party spokesperson, said.

The Social Democrats on Thursday meanwhile revealed that Stevo Pendarovski, a former advisor to Presidents Boris Trajkovski and Branko Crvenkovski, will run as their candidate in the presidential election.

The most probable date for the early general elections is April 27, which would coincide with the second round of voting in the presidential election. The first round is on April 13.

If early general elections are held, attention is expected to shift significantly away from the presidential race and on to the main prize - the battle for seats in parliament.

For Prime Minister Gruevski, who has held power since 2006, this would be the third time he has challenged the opposition in an early general election.

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