** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Wednesday, 2 April 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**Civil protection remains in northern Kosovo (*Novosti*)**

Members of the Civil Protection will continue to be deployed in the Serb municipalities in northern Kosovo and Metohija, even though it was envisaged during the dialogue in Brussels for this formation to be disbanded, ***Novosti*** learns unofficially. According to this information, a compromise solution is at hand, except that the authorities in Pristina would treat the Civil Protection, where around 200 members are engaged, as part of the so-called Kosovo security forces. Still, the Civil Protection should be under KFOR’s direct control and this way it would be separated from the system of the so-called Kosovo armed forces.

**Serb house stoned in Bresje (*Beta/KiM Radio*)**

Unidentified persons have stoned the house of Vladimir **Mitrovic** in the village of Bresje, the municipality of Kosovo Polje, ***KiM Radio*** reported. No one was injured, but the property was damaged. The incident took place on Tuesday evening, while Vladimir and his wife were sitting in the living room. One of four stones, which were thrown at the Mitrovic family house, ended up inside of it. “The window was broken. It looks like a bomb went off,” Mitrovic said for KiM Radio. The case was reported to the police and an investigation was carried out. Mitrovic said that he cannot guess who committed the attack, stressing that now he fears for the safety of his four-member family. “I cannot feel safe and be calm after what happened. We are not injured, but we have experienced stress,” Mitrovic said. The Mitrovic family had inconveniences earlier as well. A few years ago, unknown attackers threw glass bottles at them. Gracanica Mayor Branimir **Stojanovic** condemned the stoning of the house, ***Beta*** reports. “We ask the international community and Kosovo police to stop the attacks on the Serbs and to provide them a life without fear, in line with their mandate,” said Stojanovic. There are 50 Serb families living in Bresje at the moment.

**Office for Kosovo and Metohija condemns attack in Bresje (*Tanjug*)**

The Office for Kosovo and Metohija strongly condemned the attack on the house belonging to Vladimir **Mitrovic** in the village of Bresje in the municipality of Kosovo Polje. The Office calls on the international community and Pristina’s institutions to finally do something concrete, find perpetrators and condemn attacks on the Serbs and their property. “The Serbs’ survival is impossible unless they are guaranteed that no one will put their lives at risk and destroy or usurp their property, and that at least someone will be held accountable if and when something like this happens.” The Office calls on the international community to take the clear position that will put an end to such behavior and on the interim institutions in Pristina to make a clear stand on such events.

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**Residence law – response to manipulation (*Srna*)**

The Republika Srpska (RS) President Milorad **Dodik** said that political parties based in the FB&H, which have reached agreement to run jointly in the RS elections, have the right to associate, and that bringing a residence law will be the response from the RS. “The residence law will contain all the provisions of a bill proposed at the B&H level and we will enforce it. Any rejection by the High Representative will not be possible, and this time we will not abide by his decision,” Dodik told reporters in Banja Luka. Dodik says that the RS will not prevent any agreement by political parties which in any way are active in the RS, but feels that the concept that is being promoted through the 1 March Coalition is aimed at creating a different atmosphere in B&H. “From the point of view of Bosniak interests, this association is legitimate, but why then are they full of rage when we present the position that we do not want to be in a B&H as they imagine it?” Dodik asked. He says he wants legitimate, legal and fair elections, which means no manipulation in connection with residence. “In this regard, the RS gave its support to the bill which passed the B&H Council of Ministers and the House of Representatives since these are the values of European legislation, but this bill now stops those who are citing Europe,” Dodik said. Asked by reporters how he sees prospects for forming an SNSD-SDS coalition, of which there are rumors in public, Dodik said that he considers it an April Fools’ Day joke.

**Bosic: Before each election, Dodik serves up lowest manipulation of citizens with stories of referendum (*Oslobodjenje*)**

The leader of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) Mladen **Bosic** accused the Republika Srpska (RS) President Milorad **Dodik** of “serving up the lowest manipulation of citizens, without real intention of moving in the direction of creating conditions for a referendum on RS’ independence” before every election. He also accused Dodik of threatening RS’ future with his policy, primarily because with his activities he advocates “opening” the Dayton Accord through support of the idea of a third entity, and asked him whether he ever withdrew his signature from the “Prud Process,” which foresaw at least three entities. At a press conference in Banja Luka, Bosic recalled that Milorad Dodik before every election speaks of a referendum on RS’ independence, and the SDS asks him why in the past nine years of rule he has never done anything to that end, and what Dodik’s expensive lobbyists in the U.S. and other places in the world have done on that by spending a lot of money from the RS budget. “They haven’t done anything, because it wasn’t Dodik’s intent to move the RS in that direction, but to before every election launch the topic to get support from the RS voters for the national story,” said the SDS leader, who urged Dodik to publicly say whether the conditions for RS’ independence are present, and if they are, the SDS would support such a referendum. He also reminded Dodik that the SDS is in the opposition, and he is in government, and that citizens in 2006 gave him support, inter alia, on the basis of his promise that the RS would be independent within his mandate. “Nine years have passed and has anything changed,” Bosic wondered, recalling that it was not the SDS but Dodik “who promised and manipulated citizens with stories of a referendum,” and now claims that the opposition is doing this. Although he is the President of the RS, he has no intention of doing that and, therefore, the international community has never reacted to his claims of moving the RS in that direction, said Bosic.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**IMF concerned over Kosovo wages increase, downgrades GDP growth (*Reuters*, by Fatos Bytyci, 1 April 2014)**

PRISTINA - The recent 25 increase of pensions and public servants' wages will put significant pressure on Kosovo's budget and hurt the former Serbian province's private sector, an International Monetary Fund official told Reuters on Tuesday.

In 2011, the IMF canceled a precautionary programme with Kosovo when Prime Minister Hashim Thaci hiked public sector wages by up to 50 percent to keep a promise he made during the previous election campaign.

Last month, Thaci's cabinet raised salaries for 240,000 teachers, police officers, doctors, state administration, pensioners and welfare beneficiaries.

The move came a few months ahead of a next parliamentary election, expected between June and September. The opposition has accused Thaci of using public money to improve his ratings.

"The recent wage and pension increases raises concerns," the IMF resident representative in Kosovo, Jose Sulemane, said.

"Together, they will put significant pressure on the budget and hurt competitiveness in the private sector. A more moderate increase in wages and less generous benefits would have been more appropriate."

IMF and Kosovo had agreed on a 14 percent wage increase, only for the public administration, which employs some 80,000 people. There was no mention of other increases.

The broader new hike will require an additional 100 million euros ($137.82 million) for the remaining nine months of 2014 and around 130 million euros for the whole of next year.

The government did not say where the money would come from.

Kosovo is hoping to clinch a new precautionary programme with the world lender. An IMF delegation visited the country last week but a government official said the IMF would not start talks on a new loan before the elections are held.

The IMF cut its 2014 forecast for Kosovo's growth to 3-3.5 percent from 3.9 percent, which is still above most other countries in the Balkans.

The growth is largely based on positive developments in western Europe, mainly Germany and Switzerland, where up to 800,000 Kosovars work and send remittances home.

Six years after gaining independence from Serbia, the land-locked country remains one of the poorest in Europe. Government data show more than 35 percent of the population is unemployed.

Foreign investors are often put off by its reputation for organised crime and corruption and simmering tensions between the Albanian majority and the Serb minority.

($1 = 0.7256 euros) (Reporting by Fatos Bytyci; editing by Zoran Radosavljevic and Tom Heneghan)

**Serbia Refuses to Back EU Sanctions Against Russia Over Crimea (*RIA Novosti*, 1 April 2014)**

BELGRADE - Belgrade will not sanction Russia over its handling of the crisis in Ukraine, Serbia's First Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic said Tuesday.

The news came on the heels of Vucic's trip to Brussels at the helm of the Serbian delegation, where the future premier met on Monday with EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

"We respect the territorial integrity of every nation, but we will not impose sanctions against Russia," Vucic said in an interview with the state-run RTS channel, commenting on Ashton's push for Serbia to join an EU sanctions plan.

"We will not be part of this because it would mean going against a country that has never introduced sanctions against Serbia, even when it was pounded with bombs and its territorial integrity was violated by other nations," the future prime minister underscored.

Vucic is just one step away from heading the Serbian government, after his Serbian Progressive Party won by a landslide in snap parliamentary elections in March.

Ahead of the latest round of talks in Brussels, Serbian media speculated the European Union would try to press Belgrade to uphold EU sanctions on Russia after it recognized an independence referendum in Ukraine's breakaway republic of Crimea. The referendum saw over 96 percent of voters favor leaving Ukraine and joining Russia.

The vote followed a violent coup in the former Soviet country on February 22 that put an ultranationalist leadership in power. The Ukrainian parliament ousted President Viktor Yanukovych, amended the constitution and scheduled presidential elections for May 25.

Moscow has denounced these unilateral decisions as illegitimate, considered that Ukraine's lawfully-elected president has never been impeached.

The Russian-Crimean reunification hit a nerve in the United States, European Union and other countries, prompting the allies to levy targeted sanctions against dozens of Russian officials, hounding them with asset freezes and visa bans.

Broader economic sanctions have been heatedly debated for several weeks, with no clear result, as more and more businesses in Europe have warned that limits on trade with Russia would eventually cause a backlash.

Russia's Foreign Ministry earlier cautioned Western leaders against using "the language of sanctions."

**With an eye on Crimea, Bosnian Serb leader calls for confederation (*Reuters*, by Gordana Katana, 1 April 2014)**

BANJA LUKA, - Emboldened by events in Ukraine, the leader of Bosnia's Serbs called on Tuesday for Bosnia to become a confederation of three states, and again threatened a referendum on secession if the proposal fails.

Milorad Dodik, president of Bosnia's autonomous Serb Republic, has long advocated Bosnia be scrapped as a state, but has grown increasingly bold as elections approach in October that threaten to shake his 8-year grip on power.

Dodik, who has courted Russian political backing, has seized on Crimea's referendum to split from Ukraine - which was followed by Russian annexation - as a prime example of self-determination in action, unnerving Western capitals uncertain about his true intentions.

"Our next step is the opening of a dialogue ... on the restructuring of Bosnia as a confederation consisting of three states," he told a news conference in the Serb Republic's administrative center, Banja Luka.

"If this proves impossible, Republika Srpska retains the right to hold a referendum on its status."

A confederation is a non-starter for Bosnia's Muslim Bosniaks - the chief victims of Bosnia's 1992-95 war - but may win some support among ethnic Croat hardliners who have long called for their own entity within Bosnia.

After a war in which some 100,000 people were killed, a U.S.-brokered peace deal split Bosnia into two highly autonomous regions - the Serb-dominated Serb Republic and the Federation, populated mainly by Bosniaks and Croats.

The two regions are joined by a weak central authority, while the Federation itself is split into ten cantons, creating a highly-decentralised and unwieldy system that is frequently paralysed by ethnic bickering.

Under the peace accord, neither region has the right to secede or can be scrapped.

The Bosnian Serbs have resisted any reforms at the state level that they see as infringing on their autonomy, slowing progress towards the European Union and NATO, which fellow ex-Yugoslav republics Croatia and Slovenia have already joined.

CRIMEA "CONVENIENT"

British politician Paddy Ashdown, a former international overseer in postwar Bosnia, accused Russia last month of stoking Serb separatist sentiment, citing among other things Moscow's offer of a loan to the Serb Republic after the International Monetary Fund halted funding for the country.

Dodik said he expected a first installment of 70 million euros ($95 million) in April. Another 200 million euros were available over the coming year, he said, but did not specify the terms of the loan or whether it came from the Russian state or through a commercial bank.

Most analysts say Dodik's rhetoric has more to do with playing the nationalist card among voters than any real intention. Serbia, which fomented the war in Bosnia but has swung behind the goal of EU membership since the fall of strongman Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, will not want to be seen to be encouraging the breakup of Bosnia.

Crimea was "convenient" for Dodik, said Sarajevo-based Kurt Bassuener, a senior associate at the Democratisation Policy Council think-tank.

"But obviously this is unlike Ukraine - Bosnia does not border Russia, there is no Russian troop presence here, and I don't foresee the Russians flying paratroopers to Republika Srpska to support its independence bid."

Aleksandar Trifunovic, editor of the Banja Luka web portal "Buka", said Dodik's comments should be seen in the context of parliamentary and presidential elections due in mid-October, with Dodik's party losing ground in opinion polls.

Dodik has threatened a referendum "so many times in public, and so many times it has proven fruitless", he said.

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