



Regional Women's Lobby

*For Peace, Security and Justice
In Southeast Europe*

February 2010 News bulletin

Prepared by Ana Lukatela, RWL Coordinator

<http://www.rwlsee.org>

MARGOT WALLSTROM

At the beginning of February Secretary General Ban Ki Moon appointed Margot Wallstrom of Sweden as Special Representative on women and children in conflict. Her obligations include empowering women and children and bringing perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict to justice. International civil society has also stressed the importance of punishing UN peacekeepers that take part in sexual exploitation and violence while on mission. Margot Wallstrom said the challenge she faces is enormous and that violence against women continues to be the most common but least punished crime in the world.

WESTERN BALKANS CONFERENCE

Slovenia and Croatia are organizing a Conference on the Western Balkans in March, with support from the Council of Europe and the European Commission. It will be the first meeting of all political leaders from the region in 18 years, and will include Kosovo representatives the organizers confirmed.

REGIONAL COOPERATION


The EU has again stressed the importance of regional cooperation for the EU integration process. EU officials reminded western Balkan countries that the free movement of people and goods, guarantees for foreign investments and aggressive campaigns against corruption are critical steps in the integration process.

RECOM

The EU Commissions Enlargement Unit for the Western Balkans has given its full support to the establishment of truth commission in Southeast Europe, an initiative launched by NGOs in the region. EU spokespersons stated that the hope was the commission would lead efforts towards reconciliation and that the process should be bottom up and locally owned. The Humanitarian Law Center in Serbia and Documenta in Zagreb launched the REOCM initiative in 2006. The NGOs aim to collect one million signatures and send them to regional governments, which will then make a final decision about the establishment of such a commission.

ALBANIA

The Opposition Socialist Party leader Edi Rama and Prime Minister Sali Berisha met on February 13 to discuss ways to end the SP boycott of parliament. No tangible results came from the meetings and the European Commission has warned that the political stalemate needs to be resolved as it is hurting the country's application to become a EU candidate. In the election results of June 2009 that the Socialist Party disputes Berisha's party won 68 seats and Rama's 65. With the help of coalition partners, the Berisha's Democratic Party managed to form a new government supported by 75 members of parliament. But some laws, including some legislation needed for the EU integration process, require a qualified majority that can only be achieved with the opposition Socialists. The opposition has rejected advice



from EU diplomats to return to parliament and to fight for its cause there. At the same time, the government has yet to address properly the shortcomings of the June elections that, according to international monitors, were not fully in accordance with European standards. The Council of Europe has sent a delegation to Albania to try and mediate between the political rivals. The delegation proposed setting up a parliamentary committee chaired by the opposition to help reconcile the PM and opposition leader Edi Rama.

CROATIA

On February 12, 2010 the Netherlands officially dropped its blockade to the opening of the Judiciary chapter in Croatia's EU accession negotiations. This move has greatly increased Croatia's chances of finishing negotiations this year, and subsequently joining the EU in 2010.

On February 18, 2010, Croatia inaugurated its third president, Ivo Josipovic. Nine regional heads of states attended (Hungary, Slovenia, Poland, Macedonia, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina), and diplomatic delegations from 80 countries. However the key absence was that of Serbian President Boris Tadic who refused the invitation due to the participation of the Kosovo President.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

On February 10, BiH and Croatia signed an agreement to enforce the sentences of dual-citizenship criminals that evade justice by crossing the border. The new agreement would still not allow extradition, but rather would force the criminal to serve the sentence in the country of his choosing. The EU welcomed the agreement as an important


step in the fight against corruption, organized crime and war crimes.

MONTENEGRO

The EU and Montenegro have held their first ministerial political dialogue meeting in Brussels since December. Among other topics the meeting dealt with the questionnaire on which the European Commission will base its opinion regarding Montenegro's accession application and the future actions to be taken by the country. EU officials stated afterwards that there has been much improvement in Montenegro, that the questionnaire was responded to very well and that once Member states met, they would evaluate the situation and decide whether or not to offer Montenegro candidacy.

KOSOVO

The State Secretary of Serbia's Ministry for Kosovo, Oliver Ivanovic, has announced local Serb-organized elections for Mitrovica in late April or early May. Ivanovic stated that these elections would prove even further that any plans the Kosovo government, ICO or EULEX have for integrating the north of Kosovo are absurd. Moreover, Ivanovic argued that the integration plan would unnecessarily increase tension and conflict. The plan involves the creation of a northern municipality by July 2010 and Kosovo government elections in three northern Serb municipalities. The new plan's goal is to marginalize the Serb parallel structures and increase the EULEX presence. EULEX's top priority is to get Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian judges and prosecutors back to the Mitrovica District Court, so that a local, multiethnic and single judiciary can deliver



justice. Kosovo Serb leaders in the north have warned that any attempt to implement the strategy in the north will be met with riots.

If Serbia does not cooperate sufficiently with EULEX and continues to support a parallel structure in the north and obstruct Kosovo's participation in regional initiatives and trade, then it is likely that several EU countries will want to slow Serbia's path towards EU membership.

NATO will soon start scaling back its forces in Kosovo, which includes handing over the protection of Serbian cultural and historical sites to Kosovo or EULEX police. The monuments planned for handover include Gazimestan and eight different monasteries.

In her visit to Pristina on February 19, EU Foreign Minister Catherine Ashton announced the arrival of a technical team in Kosovo to evaluate the country's path to visa liberalization.

On February 18 Kosovo celebrated its second Independence Day. While citizens and government celebrated the anniversary, the opposition expressed concern over slow progress by the government to address the economy and corruption. In the last two years, the country has managed to become a member of the International Monetary Fund and of the World Bank. However, participation in regional initiatives like the Central European Free Trade Agreement and the Regional Co-operation Council is problematic due to the fact that Kosovo is not recognized by Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Relations with the EU are not legally clear, Kosovo is not considered as a country with treaty-signing powers by the EU because it is not recognized by five of its member states.

The leader of the Vetevendosje movement, Albin Kurti, has been charged with crimes including participating in a crowd committing a criminal offence; participating in a group obstructing official persons in performing official duties and calling for resistance in connection to events

in Pristina in February 2007. Kurti has been held in jail and house arrest over the past years for this case, and after his failure to appear in court on the charges in February, the EULEX court issued an order for his arrest. However after 2 days the police have not arrested him yet. Kurti himself claims not to be in hiding and has been seen in the center and has given TV interviews. More than 75 000 Kosovars have signed in a week a petition demanding the court process against Kurti be dropped. A group of CSOs has warned that this case could destabilize Kosovo.


ORA political party is in negotiations on a possible unification with the LDK party. ORA's president is RWL member Teuta Sahatqija.

MACEDONIA

Ideas to revamp the center of Skopje have caused consternation in Macedonia. The government has released its urban plan, which includes a new Orthodox Church, many statues and new buildings. The plan has also caused ethnic tensions, as none of the new statues or plans relate to the Albanian ethnic group's history.

Conflict over educational reforms has led to a boycott by Albanian pupils of newly instituted mandatory Macedonian language classes. The Albanian minority is arguing the curriculum changes are a show of power over the ethnic minority and was instituted without proper preparations.

Conflicts over historical monuments and educational curriculum have put a strain on interethnic relations, leading to one Albanian political leader, Menduh Thaci, warning of renewed war if Albanians continue to be discriminated against. International representatives to Macedonia condemned his comments. Thaci's party, the DPA, has been boycotting parliament since summer 2009.



The March EU summit has put added pressure to the resolution of the Skopje-Athens name dispute. The UN appointed mediator will be visiting Macedonia and Greece at the end of February.

SERBIA

Serbia's Foreign Minister, Vuk Jeremic, received a diplomatic note from the US, UK, France, Germany and Italy to decrease his rhetoric on Kosovo and to moderate his actions leading up to the ICJ decision on the legality of Kosovo's independence declaration. Kosovo remains the major political issue in Serbia and Serbia is lobbying to convene a special meeting of the UN general assembly after the ICJ brings down its ruling with the aim of getting the support of the GA to reopen status talks between Belgrade and Pristina.

Serbia's President, Boris Tadic, in a newspaper interview this month called his initiative to pass a parliamentary resolution condemning the Srebrenica massacre a "moral obligation" for the country. Skeptics argue that the resolution is aimed at currying favor with the ICJ in the run up to their ruling on the legality of Kosovo's independence declaration. A recent opinion poll in Serbia showed that more than half the population of Serbia does not believe the Srebrenica massacres ever took place. It is not clear yet whether Tadic's resolution will pass in parliament.

The Serbian Orthodox Church removed Archbishop Artemije as leader of the Church in Kosovo this month as he is suspected of embezzling millions of Euros. His replacement is perceived as a political moderate in comparison to Artemije's ultra-nationalist views. Members of the church became involved in a brawl in the Gracanica monastery as the change of power took place.