



Regional Women's Lobby For Peace, Security and Justice in Southeast Europe

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SPANISH EU PRESIDENCY

On January 1, Spain took over the EU six month Presidency. It has promised that EU enlargement into the Western Balkans is high on its list of priorities, as is a commitment to gender equality. Spain is one of 5 EU member states that do not recognize Kosovo so it will be interesting to see how they respond to issues concerning Kosovo during the term. Spain's PM, Mr. Zapatero, has a cabinet of nine women ministers and eight men. His government is the first in Spain's history to have such gender balance. Also, Mr. Zapatero said his presidency would give particular attention to the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina and he announced a ministerial conference in May 2010, in Sarajevo, which would bring together all countries in the region to discuss issues and further steps in the Euro-integration process. Spain also stated that a representative of Kosovo's government would be invited.

JOINT NATO – EU CONFERENCE ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

On January 27, in Brussels, the EU and NATO hosted a joint conference on Women, Peace and Security to mark this years 10th anniversary of Resolution 1325. NATO's Secretary General participated in the conference and remarked that NATO has developed guidelines for the integration of gender issues into all NATO operations based on Resolution 1325 and that in Afghanistan NATO is making efforts in order to involve more women in peace-building efforts.

EU FUND FOR WESTERN BALKANS

Following on the December 2009 conference in which plans were made for an infrastructure fund for the western Balkans, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the European Commission signed an accord on January 19 to implement a technical assistance program financed by the EU for entry candidates and potential candidates. The aim is to strengthen macro and micro-prudential supervision in the Western Balkans. The program will last for two years and cost 2.65 million Euros.

The ECB, together with the national central banks of the euro region, will

organize seminars for the central banks and supervisory authorities of Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Turkey, Serbia and Kosovo. The stability of these banking systems is critical in achieving sustainable economic growth.

JOURNALISTS IN SEE

Human Rights Watch in its 2010 global report expressed concerns about the harassment of human rights defenders and independent journalists throughout the region. In Bosnia there was a 40 percent increase in attacks against journalist by September 2009. In Croatia, journalists investigating corruption and sensitive subjects were subject to threats, removal from their posts, or court action, the report said. In Albania the ease with which journalists who annoy political or business tycoons are assaulted in public is troubling.

According to HRW, amendments to the Serbian Law on Public Information entered into force in July 2009 and caused great concern among journalists due to the excessive size of permissible fines for libel. This could discourage investigative journalism and stifle press freedom.

CROATIA

On January 10th Croatia elected its third president, Ivo Josipovic. Josipovic comes from the opposition Social Democratic party and based his campaign on anti-corruption. The inauguration is to take place on Feb 18th 2010 and Josipovic has invited all the Heads of States from the region and wider. Kosovo's President, Fatmir Sejdiu accepted the invitation and confirmed his attendance, which prompted Serbian President Boris Tadic to announce that he would boycott the inauguration if Sejdiu was present. Josipovic responded by describing Tadic's decision irrational since Serbia will sooner or later need to recognize Kosovo's independence.

January has continued to bring more very publicized arrests on charges of corruption against high-level managers of several different state firms. These investigations include even a former deputy Prime Minister, Damir Polancec.

On January 3, 2010 ex-Prime Minister Ivo Sanader attempted a shocking coup against Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor by holding a rogue press conference out of the HDZ party headquarters declaring her leadership inept and announcing his return to politics. It is suspected his desire to regain power in the party was an attempt to head off corruption investigations and charges that could lead back to him. Kosor responded the next day by rallying her own support within the party, revoking Sanader's membership and taking away his position as lifelong deputy president. Kosor was hailed nationally for this move and Sanader, who was already unpopular, has become absolutely vilified.

After a meeting between Croatian PM Kosor and her Slovenian counterpart, Slovenia has promised to unblock the opening of two further chapters of EU negotiation: fishing and the environment, while a third, foreign policy, will remain blocked. The next EU-Croatia accession conference is on 19 February.

BOSNIA

Concern over the future of Bosnia continues. Bosnian Serbs are threatening an independence referendum, Bosnian Croats are calling for a third separate entity and Bosnian Muslims are demanding a new constitution; all while the social and economic situation are worsening. Analysts are concerned that this context will lead to a very rancorous campaign in the lead up to the October general elections, in which nationalist and populist sentiments will dominate. Interethnic incidents per month rose from an average of seven in 2007, to nine in 2008 and 13 in 2009.

SERBIA

At the beginning of January Serbia filed a lawsuit in The Hague against Croatia for genocide against Serbs between 1991-1995. With both countries now having filed genocide cases against each other relations between the two seem set to worsen.

In the January 22, 2010 UNSC session on Kosovo President Tadic told members that the reconciliation process between Serbia and Kosovo would not be easy. He said the psychological barriers are high and trust needs to be restored, but a promising first step would be to recommit to finding a peaceful solution through dialogue. Kosovo's representative at the meeting, Skender Hyseni, thanked the 65 UN member states that have so far recognized the country's independence and flatly rejected Tadic's offer to renew negotiations on Kosovo's status.

In the southern region of Serbia bordering with Kosovo residents are complaining of increased tensions in the past months. Armed incidents do not happen often, only once every few months, however residents are still frustrated with insecurity. The area suffers from a strong presence of organized crime, and there is lots of trafficking of people and drugs across the border. Local residents reported gunfights on the night between January 4 and 5 however neither KFOR nor the Serbian army has investigated.

Serbia has claimed it will prepare the EU candidacy questionnaire in record time as it is already using the Montenegrin questionnaire as a model to preparing its own answers. Despite the progress, Serbian government is aware that it is unlikely that any negotiations can begin even if Serbia is granted candidate status, until Serbia completes its cooperation with the ICTY. Serbia wishes to avoid the fate of Macedonia, which has had candidate status since 2005 without starting negotiations.

Serbia received a new patriarch of its Orthodox Church in January. After being elected Irinej Gavrilovic made a statement that Kosovo is a sacred land for Serbs and that the fight to return it must never end, prompting many in the region to express concern.

Serbia's President spent the Orthodox Christmas at the Decani monastery in Kosovo. A NATO helicopter flew him in after the Kosovo government agreed to the visit provided Tadic made no political speeches. Albanian protesters gathered in front of the monastery to protest the visit of a head of state that refuses to recognize Kosovo.

ALBANIA

The Opposition boycott of legislature is continuing to paralyze parliament. Some argue that it has enabled the government to pass dubious laws and undermine Albania's chance of obtaining EU candidate status this year. Albania's parliament speaker has stated that if opposition members don't take the parliamentary oath by 7 March 2010, they will be replaced according to the constitution. The country has continued to struggle with catastrophic flooding over much of the northern region of Albania.

KOSOVO

The UN's SRSG for Kosovo, Lambert Zannier appeared before the UN Security Council on January 22 to participate in the discussion on Kosovo. He reported that although returns of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees have sharply risen recently, lack of economic prospects and safety concerns have kept the number from reaching the UN's goals. Zannier delivered his assessment one week after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon gave a quarterly report on Kosovo. Ban noted that continuing interethnic tensions in northern Mitrovica are causing concern, and said the overall security situation in the fledgling country is "relatively calm, but potentially fragile." The UNSC called on Kosovo to increase standards of governance and the rule of law.

MACEDONIA

Macedonia's President Georgi Ivanov has promised to push for a solution to the country's long-running name dispute in 2010, but has stated that no solution will come at the price of 'putting identity onto the negotiating table'. He stressed that Macedonian citizens were the ones most interested in the Euro-Atlantic accession, but not at the price of dignity and identity. Analysts are concerned about a backlash effect by Macedonians against EU and NATO over the name dispute – almost three years has now passed since April 2008 when NATO found

that Macedonia had fulfilled all requirements for accession. It is seen as unlikely that the dispute could be resolved by March 2010, however EU officials are optimistic that by June 2010 negotiations with Macedonia could start. The UN mediator is expected to assign a date for fresh talks soon.

Interestingly, statistics thus far show that travel from Macedonia to EU has risen only insignificantly since the visa regime was lifted. Travel agencies were expecting a boom in ticket sales, however are left disappointed. The poor economy is blamed, as travel remains a luxury.