

STRATEGIC BALKANS

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Date: 1 April 2018

Title: Fear returns to Bosnia as Putin stirs ethnic tension

Author: Christina Lamb

Source: The Times

Key words: Balkans, Srebrenica, Russia, Bosnia Herzegovina.

Link: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fear-returns-to-bosnia-as-putin-stirs-ethnic-tension-ffr6n6jsr>

Summary

Mladen Grujicic is the first Serbian mayor of Srebrenica since the massacre took place and his statements are already outraging relatives and survivors of the genocide. "I consider it a horrific crime, but what happened to Serbs was just as bad. It's just Muslims got all the attention". One of the survivors of the massacre, Sadmira Nukic said that "having a Serbian mayor of Srebrenica is like making Osama bin Laden the mayor of New York". Another survivor, Hasan Nuhanovic, said that "Bosnia used to be likened to a leopard's skin because we were so ethnically intermingled, but now everything is separate. The only thing Bosnian is the passport". The Dayton Accords of 1995 stopped the fighting but without addressing the root causes. Now all three ethnicities have their own narratives and documentation centers of the war. Spurred by politicians in Zagreb and Belgrade, Croats are arguing they should have their own entity within Bosnia while Serbs are demanding a referendum on independence, supported by their long-time allies in Russia.

Date: 2 April 2018

Title: War of words between Kosovo and Turkey

Author: Thomas Roser

Source: Die Presse

Key words: Balkans, Kosovo, Turkey, extradition, Recep Erdogan

Link: <https://diepresse.com/home/ausland/aussenpolitik/5399084/Wortgefechte-zwischen-Kosovo-und-der-Tuerkei?from=suche.intern.portal>

Summary

"No one should threaten the government and the prime minister of Kosovo. No country, no leader – no matter how powerful – can control us". These are the words spoken by the Deputy Prime Minister Fatmir Limaj to the Turkish leader Recep Erdogan. Shortly after declaration of independence on 17 February 2008, Kosovo was recognized by Turkey, however tensions are rising after the arrest and transfer of six alleged Gulen followers from Kosovo to Turkey. Erdogan stated that Prime Minister Haradinaj is a "puppet whose strings are pulled by others [...] so you can work against Turkey? What kind of politics is that? I know that my Kosovar brothers are against this decision. You will be held accountable: The premier's career will come to an end". This statement came after Prime Minister Haradinaj fired his Interior Minister and intelligence chief. Nevertheless, the balance of power in Kosovo is riding on a very thin line. President Thaci claims that he wasn't informed about the operation and the population is beginning to question who really is governing Kosovo.

Date: 11 April 2018

Title: More jobs in Western Balkans, but growth slow

Author: The World Bank

Source: The World Bank

Key words: Western Balkans, economy, employment

Link: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/04/11/more-jobs-in-western-balkans-but-growth-slows>

Summary

Despite the creation of 190,000 new jobs in the first nine months of 2017, growth in the Western Balkans declined. According to the latest World Bank Regular Economic Report showed that GDP in the region declined from 3.1% in 2016 to an estimated 2.4% in 2017, however growth is forecast to rebound to 3.2% in 2018 and 3.5% by 2019. The harsh winter of 2017 led to more energy imports, large infrastructure projects required more equipment from abroad, and more goods were imported for higher consumption. Nevertheless, employment is on the rise in the region, reaching 42.6% percent in September 2017, and unemployment was 5.6% lower than the previous year with youth unemployment dropping from 37.5% in 2016 to 31.5% in 2017. There's a need for bold structural reforms to support job creation and encourage sustainable growth in the medium term, such as the development of the private sector and reducing barriers to labor force participation.

Date: 16 April 2018

Title: Montenegro, the eternal Dukanovic and the pro-EU choice win

Author: Stefano Carrer

Source: Il Sole 24 Ore

Key words: Balkans, Montenegro, elections

Link: <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/mondo/2018-04-16/montenegro-vince-sempiterno-dukanovic-e-scelta-pro-ue-160018.shtml?uclid=AErX5LZE&fromSearch>

Summary

63,9% of voters in Montenegro decided to elect Milo Dukanovic as the new president of the country with a majority of almost 54% over his rival Milan Bojanovic. Dukanovic has dominated the political life of the country for over a quarter of a century and during the electoral campaign he's been accused by the opposition of a resurgence organized crime, Caesarism, of favoring corruption and of not opposing crime sufficiently. The leader of the Socialist Democratic Party denied all accusations and set the campaign as a sort of referendum on the pro-Western choice, considered necessary for the stability and prosperity of the nation. The road map drawn by the EU speculates on an eventual entrance of Montenegro in the EU by 2025, however Dukanovic claimed during the electoral campaign that it could happen within 5 years.

Date: 17 April 2018

Title: Two Balkan states clear hurdle in quest to join EU

Author: Michael Peel, Neil Buckley and Laura Pitel

Source: Financial Times

Key words: Balkans, European Commission, EU expansion, Albania, Macedonia

Link: <https://www.ft.com/content/2234d578-418a-11e8-803a-295c97e6fd0b>

Summary

The European Commission recommended starting talks with Albania and Macedonia to join the EU, in an effort to counter Russian effort to influence in the region. However, their accession is far from a done deal as many member states are debating whether the two candidate states have done enough to join the bloc. Johannes Hahn, the EU's enlargement commissioner told that an expansion would depend on candidate countries "maintaining and deepening the current reform momentum". Other obstacles include the skepticism shown by France and the Netherlands about the whole enlargement process and the ability of Balkan nations to fight against organized crime, amongst other issues. Nevertheless, Edi Rama, Albania's prime minister, stated that it would be "crazy" not to include a region central to migration routes and of growing Russian interests. Albania has been attempting to crack down on organized crime and drugs trade, whilst Macedonia, with Zoran Zaev as its new prime minister, has embraced a reformist, pro-western path, even launching talks with Greece over the decade-old dispute over the country's name.

Date: 17 April 2018

Title: Juncker warns of likely war in Balkans if EU doesn't 'open up' to ex-Yugoslavia

Author: Sputnik News

Source: Sputnik News

Key words: Balkans, Jean-Claude Juncker, European Commission, expansion

Link: <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201804171063639507-eu-balkans-eu-war/>

Summary

"If we do not open to countries in that highly complicated and tragic region, and if we do not open a European perspective to them, we will see war returning to that area as we saw in the 1990s". This is the statement made by the European Commissioner President Jean-Claude Juncker, that continued by saying "I do not want to see war returning to the Balkans and so we need to open up to them". Amongst the many issues in the region, territorial disputes are amongst the most troublesome. Serbia and Kosovo have began a dialogue on normalization but the two sides have not yet signed a legally binding agreement. Furthermore, Slovenia and Croatia also have a territorial dispute, where both countries claim the same territories in Piran Bay of the Adriatic Sea. Jean-Claude Juncker mentioned earlier this year that the Balkan countries preparing for accession to the EU wouldn't be able to join until Slovenia and Croatia resolve their border dispute.

Date: 21 April 2018

Title: France wants EU expansion freeze amid Balkans war warning

Author: Lorne Cook

Source: The Chicago Tribune

Key words: Balkans, Emmanuel Macron, EU, expansion, European Commission

Link: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/sns-bc-eu--europe-balkans-20180417-story.html>

Summary

Top EU officials have warned that the Balkan states could face a return to war if countries in the region have no hope of joining the union, however French President Emmanuel Macron ruled out any expansion until the bloc is reformed. The statement followed the recommendation by the European Commission to launch membership talks with Albania and Macedonia. The 28 EU member states need to agree unanimously for any country to become a member, and the promise of accession to the bloc has been a powerful driver of political and democratic reform in Balkan countries. However with the exit of Britain from the EU, Macron said that “I will only support an enlargement when there is first a deepening and a reform of our Europe. [...] I don’t want a Balkans that turns towards Turkey or Russia, but I don’t want a Europe that, functioning with difficulty at 28 and tomorrow as 27, would decide that we can continue to gallop off, to be tomorrow 30 or 32, with the same rules”. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker had a different view on the subject. “If we remove from these countries, in this extremely complicated region, I should say tragically, a European perspective, we are going to live what we already went through in the 1990’s, I don’t want a return to war in the Western Balkans.

Date: 23 April 2018

Title: Karadzic demands repeal of guilty verdict

Author: Spiegel Online

Source: Spiegel Online

Key words: Balkans, conflict, Radovan Karadzic, Srebrenica genocide

Link: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/voelkermord-radovan-karadzic-fordert-aufhebung-des-schuldspruchs-a-1204374.html>

Summary

Radovan Karadzic was discovered 13 years ago in Serbia as he was running away from the ICTY and hiding as an alternative healer. He was eventually delivered to the court where he was convicted of war crimes and sentenced to 40 years in prison as he was considered politically the main culprit for the genocide of Srebrenica. The former president of the self-proclaimed Bosnian Serb republic has now begun the appeal process in The Hague, demanding the cancellation of his guilty verdict as his lawyer stated that the ex-Serb leader had not received a fair trial. Karadzic stated that he “warned before the war but did not stoke it. [...] We have never expelled anyone, that’s a myth”. On the other side, prosecutors are also appealing against the verdict as they’re demanding a life sentence for what has been considered the worst war crime in Europe since the end of the Second World War. The appeal procedure is being negotiated by the UN-Tribunal Mechanism, the successor organization to the War Crimes Tribunals for ex-Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Date: 23 April 2018

Title: Croatian tycoon Ivica Todoric to be extradited in Agrokor fraud case

Author: Deutsche Welle

Source: Deutsche Welle

Key words: Balkans, Ivica Todoric, Agrokor, Croatia

Link: <http://www.dw.com/en/croatian-tycoon-ivica-todoric-to-be-extradited-in-agrokor-fraud-case/a-43499522>

Summary

Ivica Todoric and 14 other people are being investigated by Croatian authorities over the crisis at food company Agrokor, the country's biggest private firm by "misrepresenting the business and financial reports of Agrokor between 2006 and April 2017 by concealing expenses, debts and financial claims". Todoric is also accused of abusing his authority as president of the board to make a gain of over 8 million euros. He flew to Britain in November 2017 and handed himself in to the Metropolitan Police Extradition Unit, and has since been fighting an extradition request from Croatia, claiming the accusations against him and his associates were unfounded and part of a "political process". Nevertheless, Chief Magistrate Emma Arbuthnot turned down Todoric's request to stay in the UK saying there was "strong evidence" that Todoric had committed the alleged offenses. Until his trial, he was free on a £100,00 bail but had been ordered to wear an electronic tag, sign in at Kensington police station three times a week and surrender his travel documents.

Date: 29 April 2018

Title: Balkan's broken cities

Author: Juan Diego Quesada

Source: El País

Key words: Balkans, ethnic division, Bosnia Herzegovina, cities

Link: https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/04/28/actualidad/1524941302_578806.html

Summary

The reality in some Balkan cities shows that coexistence between different ethnicities has been blown up in the early nineties. What used to be neighbors suddenly found themselves in opposite trenches, aiming at each other through a rifle. Even though almost three decades have passed, ethnic barriers still remain in some areas; kids go to different schools, the elderly go to different cafes and use their own postal codes even if they live in the same city. Mostar is a clear example of this division. In one of the widest avenues there used to be a trench, and "that trench continues in our heads". The city has two ambulance services, two fire departments, two electric companies, two educational systems, two telephone networks, two postal services and even two football teams. Of the 105.800 people living in Mostar, 48% are Croats, 44% Bosnians, 4% Serbs and 3% of other origins. The same situation can be found in Mitrovica where the city is so completely divided in two halves, where the Serbs are in the north and the Albanians in the south. A barricade has been erected on one of the main bridges of Mitrovica after violent incidents occurred a few years ago, this is the border between Serbs and Albanians. Even in Sarajevo there's a clear distinction between ethnicities. Of the 275.000 people living in the Bosnian capital, 80% are Bosnians, 5% Croats and 4% Serbs. However the east of the city is part of the República Srpska and of the 62.000 people living here, 94% are Serbs.

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