



Viewing cable 09BELGRADE765, SERBIA IN THE WAKE OF VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN'S VISIT

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Serbia in the wake of Vice President Biden's visit

Пише: Wikileaks

понедељак, 27 децембар 2010 20:32

reference ID e.g.

Reference ID

Created

Released

Classification

Origin

[09BELGRADE765](#)

[2009-07-29 13:01](#)

[2010-12-09 21:09](#)

[CONFIDENTIAL](#)

[Embassy Belgrade](#)

Serbia in the wake of Vice President Biden's visit

Пише: Wikileaks

понедељак, 27 децембар 2010 20:32

VZCZCXRO9271

RR RUEHAG RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL
RUEHSR

DE RUEHBW #0765/01 2101350

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

R 291351Z JUL 09

FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0109

INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC

RHMFSS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE

RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

Serbia in the wake of Vice President Biden's visit

Пише: Wikileaks

понеделјак, 27 децембар 2010 20:32

Wednesday, 29 July 2009, 13:51

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BELGRADE 000765

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA

AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY

AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG

AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

Serbia in the wake of Vice President Biden's visit

Пише: Wikileaks

понедељак, 27 децембар 2010 20:32

EO 12958 DECL: 2019/07/29

TAGS ECON, PREL, SR, MARR, PGOV

SUBJECT: SERBIA IN THE WAKE OF VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN'S VISIT

REF: A) BELGRADE 725 B) BELGRADE743

CLASSIFIED BY: Jennifer Brush, Charge, US Department of State, US Embassy Belgrade;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

¶ 1. (C) Vice President Biden's May 20 visit to Belgrade, during which he met with President Tadic, Prime Minister Cvetkovic, and Defense Minister Sutanovac, marked a "new beginning" in the bilateral relationship thanks to the core message that the United States recognized Serbia as an important regional partner and potential contributor to global prosperity and stability. Two months later, we have seen constructive engagement from the Serbian government on a certain number of issues. Our challenge now is to maintain and build on the momentum generated by the Vice President's visit to keep pushing Serbia forward on Euro-Atlantic integration, regional relations, economic development, and the bilateral relationship. During this several-month period between Ambassadors, post urges Washington policymakers to visit Belgrade and engage in international fora with their Serbian counterparts as frequently as possible on these key issues. End Summary.

Euro-Atlantic Integration

¶ 2. (C) The Vice President's message that the United States wanted Serbia to consider joining NATO, but would not push it to do so given the lasting impact of the 1999 NATO intervention, was well-received by the Serbian government and public. Lively public debate about the pros and cons of joining NATO was triggered by the recent 10th anniversary of the bombings, and was given additional impetus by the VPOTUS visit. In addition, the Vice President's decision to meet separately with Minister of Defense Dragan Sutanovac has given this reform-oriented advocate of cooperation with NATO additional credibility and weight in the policymaking process. Moving forward, we should continue to expand our vibrant military-to-military relationship with Serbia, work with partners to educate the public about the benefits of NATO membership, and encourage the Serbian government to cut through its interagency squabbles and open its long-awaited NATO mission in Brussels. We should also encourage Serbia to play an increasingly active role in global security issues, for example by sending police to Afghanistan within the ISAF framework.

¶ 3. (C) It is also in our interest to find new ways to support Serbia's aspirations to join the European Union, in that integration is the surest guarantee of increased prosperity and stability in the Balkans. Our existing assistance programs are already focused on the reforms needed for successful EU candidacy, from the economic sector to good governance and rule of law, and should be continued. While progress is slow and imperfect, the Serbian government is gradually working its way through the mountain of reform legislation that it must adopt and implement in these areas. Its main challenge now is to convince The Netherlands that its efforts to capture ICTY indictees Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadzic are sincere and effective, as the Dutch insist on Serbia's full cooperation with The Hague Tribunal as a prerequisite to unfreezing the Interim Trade Agreement and ratifying the Stabilization and Association Agreement. Pursuant to Vice President Biden's discussion of the issue with President Tadic, we are working with the FBI to bring a fugitive investigation expert to Belgrade to review the case file on Mladic and determine whether there are avenues of investigation or techniques that have not yet been applied. Continued engagement with the Dutch government to identify steps the Serbian government could take to demonstrate its best efforts to cooperate with the ICTY would enhance our leverage with the Serbian government.

Regional Relations

¶ 4. (C) The Vice President's clear statement during his visit that the United States is not asking Serbia to recognize Kosovo helped defuse tension over this issue. Some in government, most notably Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic and officials from the Kosovo Ministry, continue to take an obstinate and non-constructive public approach to relations with Kosovo, however. Although we are still seeking a modus operandi in which Serbian and Kosovo officials can engage in regional fora on essential areas of cooperation, including trade, and organized crime, some progress is happening behind the scenes. In the two months since the Vice President's visit, the Serbian government has encouraged Kosovo Serbs to return to the Kosovo Police Service (KPS); worked with KEK to encourage Kosovo Serbs to sign electricity contracts; and fired Northern Kosovo hardliner Marko Jaksic from his GOS-paid job as head of the Mitrovica Health Center.

¶ 5. (C) We are not seeing a sufficiently constructive approach from the Serbian government on decentralization and the ICO-led plan to create five new Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo through municipal elections in November, however; rather than recognizing it as the best opportunity for Kosovo Serbs to defend their interests, President Tadic and others have made unhelpful, preemptive statements saying that the Serbian government cannot approve any elections carried out under the Ahtisaari Plan by the "false state" of Kosovo. Another stumbling block is Serbia's intent to hold elections in August in Kosovo for the Belgrade-controlled parallel structures in two municipalities. It is premature to conclude that the Serbian government's position on the November elections is immutable, however. President Tadic's statement that "the conditions do not exist for us to encourage Kosovo Serbs to participate in these elections" provides us an opening to initiate a dialogue with pragmatic elements in Belgrade -- namely Tadic and his advisors -- about the conditions under which the Serbian government could support Kosovo Serb participation. While it may not ultimately be possible to reach common ground, it is important to try.

Economic Development

¶ 6. (C) During his meeting with Prime Minister Cvetkovic, Vice President Biden praised the Serbian government's efforts to minimize the impact of the global economic crisis on the country. He encouraged Serbia to deal with the issue of property restitution, as it was the only country in the region that had not done so, and the uncertainty surrounding land ownership was having a negative effect on the investment climate. Since the visit, a draft law on zoning and the use of construction land that has been in development for several years has moved forward

from the Government to the Parliament. As currently written, the draft law will clarify the situation by granting title to land to those who currently have ownership or use rights of the buildings on it. The law will almost completely eliminate the possibility of restitution in kind to claimants, however, except in the case of vacant/undeveloped property. The draft law foresees the creation of a restitution fund that would be financed by the proceeds of the conversion of privatized public enterprise land to other uses. In order to ensure the equity of the process, which is of particular interest to the Serbian-American diaspora, we are engaging with the government and parliament to carefully consider the two issues - restitution and zoning - so as not to have the zoning law preempt legitimate claims for restitution (reftel A).

¶ 7. (C) Serbia continues to face a tough road toward economic development. While it continues to make progress toward WTO, accession is not expected before mid-2010 due to the need for significant amounts of additional legislation. Meanwhile, the economic crisis continues to bite into Serbia as foreign direct investment has nearly dried up and the government has become increasingly dependent on borrowing to meet budgetary demands this year. It will be important to encourage the government to continue making the necessary reforms to free the economy from the old state-centered model and to encourage greater market liberalization and entrepreneurship, so that it will be competitive once the global economy rebounds.

Bilateral Relationship

¶ 8. (C) President Obama's election generated enormous goodwill in Serbia, and people here believe that the new Administration is taking a more even-handed approach to the Balkans than in the past. Vice President Biden's visit confirmed and cemented this impression on the part of both the Serbian government and public, by demonstrating that one of the most vocal critics of the Milosevic regime now saw the leadership of Serbia as potential partners and forces for regional stability. We still have a great deal of work to do to uproot entrenched stereotypes of the U.S. Government as imperialistic, anti-Serb, and pro-Albanian, however. A recent Medium Gallup poll showed Serbia tied with Pakistan for first place - at 61% -- on the list of countries whose citizens hold negative views of the United States. Frequent statements from the Serbian government characterizing the United States as an international bully, combined with a pronounced aversion to acknowledging U.S. partnership and assistance and a penchant for exaggerating Russian contributions and the importance of the Non-Aligned Movement, contribute to this outdated public perception. We will push our Serbian interlocutors to take a more balanced and mature approach to their public statements about the United States, while continuing our intense public diplomacy efforts to highlight our work here.

¶ 9. (C) Visas are a central issue in Serbia's relations with its Western partners, and the United States is no exception. Serbian citizens long for the days when they could travel freely with Yugoslav passports and chafe under visa requirements, seeing them as a "sanction" held over from the 1990s. While the application process for U.S. visas is light-years more customer friendly and less onerous than that of most European countries, which frequently require applicants to queue for hours three or four times, it has become the subject of debate now that the European Union is moving forward with Schengen visa liberalization for Serbia. Given the stable situation in Serbia and the relatively low refusal rate, post believes that it would be justified to consider increasing the standard validity of non-immigrant visas from the current three years to five (reftel B). This would have a beneficial impact on our workload at a time of reduced consular staffing, while also allowing us to send a signal to the Serbian people that we recognize the progress that the country has made since its democratic transition and are eager for increased engagement.

Comment

¶ 10. (C) Although the current Serbian government is democratic and pro-European, it is also frequently unfocused and politically timid. Our challenge is to make it clear that Vice President Biden's visit wasn't merely a reward for good behavior, but rather the start of what needs to be a much more intensive dialogue on how we can work together more closely and productively on our shared objectives. End Comment.

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