OHR SRT News Summary, 18 May 1999

Headlines:

- RS MPs discussing budget on the eve of donors conference
- one casualty and 17 injured reported in the bombing of Valjevo
- international officials on Kosovo crisis – to increase diplomatic activities or air-strikes
- General Meigs in Banja Luka – oil to the FRY exclusively as humanitarian aid and through the ICRC

The third extraordinary session of the RS NA is currently ongoing in Banja Luka discussing the proposal on RS budget for this year worth KM 636,680 million. RS MPs are expected to adopt it as it represents one of the conditions for the forthcoming donors conference in Brussels. Shortly after the discussion on the budget started, MPs from the SRS left the session and held a press conference saying that by adopting the budget the RS NA was going to recognize the legitimacy of the caretaker government. MPs will also be voting on four draft laws passed by the BiH PA. At the initiative of the SDS, an item was added to the agenda asking for the RS NA to adopt a conclusion saying that no BiH representatives should attend the European conference on the Balkans scheduled for 27 June in Bonn unless there are representatives from the FRY there. During last night, NATO targeted Leskovac, Vranje, Belgrade (Batajanica), the area of Fruska Gora, Leskovac and the bridge in the centre of Vladicin Han. NATO today bombed Valjevo, one casualty and 15 injured reported.

In addition to Valjevo, bombings have today also been reported in Belgrade, Sabac and Sremska Mitrovica. NATO bombed the Gelgrade-Nis motorway. Three cluster bombs hit the industrial area of Nis today. In the area of Kosovo, NATO targeted the

area of Prizren, Suva Reka and Pristina.

The German Foreign Ministry have today confirmed to BETA that the meeting between the respective foreign ministers of the seven most developed countries and Russia will be taking place in Petersburg tomorrow. The meeting will resume work on preparing a resolution needed to start a political process to resolve the Kosovo crisis.

BETA has quoted U.S. President, Bill Clinton, as saying that NATO air strikes were giving results and that he hoped for a diplomatic settlement to the Kosovo crisis, but that NATO should not dismiss the possibility of deploying ground troops in the area.

The Russian envoy for the Balkans, Victor Tchernomyrdin, today arrived in Finland to meet with the Finnish President and the Deputy U.S. Secretary of State and discuss a political solution of the crisis in Kosovo. Before departing for Finland, Tchernomyrdin stated that whatever the results of the Helsinki talks, he was going to visit Belgrade tomorrow.

The Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, in a phone conversation with the Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar, stated that the NATO aggression against the FRY had jeopardized the achievements of world diplomacy in the past few years. The only result of the aggression, Yeltsin added, is the deterioration of the humanitarian catastrophe.

BETA reports that the Russian Defence Minister, Igor Sergeyev, stated that Russia was confident that NATO was preparing for a land operation in the FRY regardless of the atmosphere of the negotiating process.

After meeting the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, the Italian PM, Massimo D'Alemo, stated that Italy and Germany were not going to offer a joint document on a political solution of the Kosovo crisis, but that they would launch a joint initiative within NATO advocating for a just solution

for the crisis in the Balkans. SRNA reports that both statesmen agreed that the UN SC should draft a resolution on Kosovo based on the plan designed by the G8.

AFP reports that the French Foreign Minister, Hubert Vedrine, stated in Brussels that NATO was not planning to launch a land intervention in Kosovo. Vedrine dismissed the possibility of NATO strikes being suspended prior to Belgrade's acceptance of requests set by the IC.

According to the Spokesperson for the British PM, Tony Blair, there are no disagreements between Great Britain and Germany on the issue of possible deployment of NATO troops in the area of Kosovo.

The Romanian President has stated that Romanian troops will not be taking part in any possible NATO land intervention in Kosovo on any conditions.

After meeting the NATO Secretary- General, Javier Solana, in Brussels, the Leader of the Democratic Union of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova, stated that NATO should continue bombing military targets in Kosovo.

BETA reports that the Spokesperson for Pentagon, Kenneth Bacon, has stated that the decision to release two Serb soldiers captured by the KLA is not a sign of good will nor a positive answer to the release of three American troops earlier this month.

(Reactions in the FRY to the Kosovo crisis) BETA has quoted Vuk Draskovic as requesting the FRY authorities to immediately accept principles set by the G7 and Russia for a political solution of the Kosovo crisis. An official representative of the FRY Foreign Ministry today claimed that the FRY was open for principles set by the G8 but that it needed additional clarifications regarding some of them. BETA has today quoted Zoran Djindjic, the leader of the Democratic Party, as saying that a possible NATO land offensive in Kosovo would be a

catastrophe and would lead to far more civilian casualties than NATO air strikes.

According to Montenegrin media reports today, the FRY Army has released 120 Kosovo Albanians that were taken off from buses heading towards Albania a few days ago. Only two Albanians from the same group are still being kept by the FRY military authorities for their participation in the KLA.

France Press reports on a statement by the German Foreign Ministry saying that after losing the forth unmanned aerial vehicle in the FRY, Germany has decided to temporarily suspend any further such flights above the area.

NATO held a regular press briefing in Brussels. Spokesperson Shea stated that NATO was planning to send additional aircraft to Italy and Turkey to reinforce its air strikes against the FRY. Shae went on to claim growing resistance in Serbia against the FRY President, Slobodan Milosevic. Shea confirmed that Ibrahim Rugova had stated that he was advocating an independent Kosovo. General Jertz gave specifics regarding results of NATO air strikes in the past 24 days and claimed that KLA was continuing with military operations in Kosovo.

The Spokesperson for the EC mission in BiH, Ivo Ivic Gabara, at an international press conference in Sarajevo today, stated that the EU had acknowledged the fact that NATO air strikes against the FRY had considerably affected the economy of the RS. According to the Spokesperson for UNHCR, Wendy Rappaport, there were about 17,600 refugees from the FRY registered in the RS so far.

The RS Vice- President, Mirko Sarovic, and the RS PM, Milorad Dodik, held separate meetings with the SFOR Force Commander in BiH, U.S. General Meigs, in Banja Luka today. After meeting Sarovic, Meigs told the press that SFOR troops were not involved in the aggression against the FRY and that Tuzla airport was not being used for NATO actions there. Meigs went

on to clarify details regarding a memorandum on the import of oil and oil products and their further distribution to the FRY that was signed last night. According to the Memorandum, fuel can only be delivered to the FRY as humanitarian aid and through the ICRC. The PM, Milorad Dodik, also met with the Croatian Ambassador in BiH, Damir Zoric, on economic cooperation between the two countries. After the meeting, Zoric stated that Croatia was going to continue to hold its consular days in Banja Luka.

The BiH PA House of Peoples today unanimously adopted the budget needed for BiH institutions and BiH international obligations for the current year. The budged had earlier been agreed upon with the IMF and the World Bank.

The BiH Presidency met in Federal Sarajevo today. The meeting focused on preparations for the donors conference that is to take place in Brussels this week. The Presidency agreed to invite the High Representative and the Head of OSCE mission in BiH to attend their next session and inform them about the process that is currently ongoing to design a new law on elections.

The President of the BiH Presidency, Zivko Radisic, met with the Greek Ambassador in BiH in Serb Sarajevo today, on the current situation in BiH in the light of solving the crisis in the Balkans.

The President of the Brcko Executive Board, Ivan Krndelj, who is also the President of the New Croatian Initiative for the municipality of Ravne, today told SRNA that his party was not supporting the proposal entitled "Statute of Brcko – BiH District" that had recently been submitted to Supervisor Farrand by the Muslim partner from the Federation.

The Special UN Rapporteur on Human Rights, Jiri Dienstbier, visited the town of Brcko today where he met with the local Mayor and his Deputy. The meetings discussed problems of vital

importance for the citizens of Brcko.

(News from the BiH Federation)

The RS Association of Journalists have today denied recent reports, including those by the IMC, claiming that BiH associations of journalists have agreed on the establishment of a Press Council.