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## TOP BOSNIAN SERB AGREES TO RESIGN

By JANE PERLEZ

Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb political chief who led his people in a brutal war of ethnic separation, has agreed to give up political power immediately, the special United States envoy, Richard C. Holbrooke, said here today.

The agreement removes an obstacle to September's national elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and could aid the flagging peace effort by removing from visible public life a man indicted for genocide and other war crimes.

But Mr. Holbrooke acknowledged that it fell short of the goal of removing Dr. Karadzic from Bosnia and putting him on trial at the war crimes tribunal in The Hague, something Western nations have long demanded.

"This is a minimal acceptable package," Mr. Holbrooke said. Only a few days ago Mr. Holbrooke told Western and Bosnian officials that if Dr. Karadzic did not agree to leave Bosnia, the West would reimpose economic sanctions on Serbia. For now, Dr. Karadzic remains in his mountain hideaway of Pale, near Sarajevo, and the threat of sanctions has withered.

The signed agreement was negotiated with President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia, who in turned exerted pressure on the Bosnian Serb leader.

The Bosnian Government and Western officials had considered Dr. Karadzic's presence as head of the major political party in the Serb part of Bosnia, and his control over the police, news media and politics there, as serious obstacles to fair elections.

Still, Dr. Karadzic's hard-line nationalist colleagues remain in power and there is wide suspicion that he will continue to exert influence behind the scenes. Mr. Holbrooke cautioned that in order for the Bosnian elections to be run successfully, the agreement, which was signed by Dr. Karadzic, his replacements in the Bosnian Serb power structure and Mr. Milosevic, had to be "implemented correctly."

In Sarajevo, the news of the agreement was welcomed by the Bosnian Government, which removed its threat of boycotting the election if Dr. Karadzic remained in office. Ejup Ganic, the Bosnian Vice President, said Dr. Karadzic's agreement would enhance the prospects of fair elections.

But Mr. Ganic said he remained concerned that Dr. Karadzic, whose campaign posters are plastered all over Serb-held Bosnia, would remain a powerful influence unless he was sent to The Hague.

The international tribunal there says Dr. Karadzic bears responsibility for the Bosnian Serb policy of "ethnic cleansing," in which hundreds of thousands of Muslim civilians were uprooted or killed. In the most notorious case, thousands of Muslim men and boys are believed to have been massacred after the Serbian conquest of the town of Srebrenica last year.

In the agreement, Dr. Karadzic said he had handed over power as president of the self-styled Bosnian Serb republic to Biljana Plavsic, his equally nationalist deputy. Another loyalist, Aleksa Buha, replaces Dr. Karadzic as chairman of the Serb Democratic Party. The one-page agreement, signed Thursday night, also stipulates that Dr. Karadzic will not appear in public or on radio or television -- forums that Dr. Karadzic, a clever propagandist, has used to great effect.

Mr. Holbrooke said there was "no guarantee" that Dr. Karadzic would conform to the intent of the agreement, and suggested it was possible he could remain a strong behind-the-scenes influence.

But the envoy appeared hopeful that the dynamics of Bosnian Serb internal political rivalry combined with Mr. Milosevic's interest in avoiding reimposition of economic sanctions could mean the end of Dr. Karadzic's power.

Early this week Robert Frowick, an American diplomat who is supervising the elections in Bosnia, said Dr. Karadzic's political party could not take part if he did not resign his post. This added to the pressure on Dr. Karadzic to resign.

Today Mr. Holbrooke said that if Dr. Karadzic defied the new agreement, his political party would be banned during the election campaign and that Belgrade would face economic sanctions. He did not spell out what actions would set off these responses.

"As of this morning, Radovan Karadzic is no longer president of Republika Srpska and he has relinquished the office and all powers associated," with it, Mr. Holbrooke, using the Bosnian Serbs' name for their breakaway region, said at a news conference this morning after 10 hours of talks.

"I want to stress he knew what he was signing," Mr. Holbrooke said. "He knew he was signing the end of his political career."

To insure that Dr. Karadzic signed the agreement, which was faxed to him in Pale, the Bosnian Serbs' headquarters, Mr. Milosevic's chief of state security, Jovica Stanisic, was dispatched to Pale by helicopter Thursday night as a witness, Mr. Holbrooke said.

Mr. Stanisic, one of Mr. Milosevic's most trusted operatives, returned after midnight to Mr. Milosevic's Belgrade residence with the original signed document. Mr. Holbrooke and his team were waiting there with the Serbian President.

Mr. Holbrooke said the most powerful politician in Serb-held Bosnia would now be Momcilo Krajisnik, the president of the Bosnian

Serb parliament, who is as much against a multi-ethnic Bosnia as Dr. Karadzic is.

But Mr. Krajisnik is easier for the United States to accept because he is not indicted for war crimes and his candidacy in September as the Bosnian Serb member of the planned tripartite Bosnian presidency does not therefore fly in the face of the Dayton accords.

Mr. Krajisnik has been described as both a rival and an ally of Dr. Karadzic. Mr. Holbrooke appeared to be counting on Mr. Krajisnik's appetite for power to overtake his friendship with Dr. Karadzic.

Dr. Karadzic's replacement, Mrs. Plavsic, who assumes the title of temporary acting president of Republika Srpska, is as defiant about the Dayton, Ohio, peace accords as Dr. Karadzic. But she has not been indicted by The Hague tribunal.

The new head of the Serb Democratic Party, Mr. Buha, is also a hard-liner and loyal to Dr. Karadzic. He is the Bosnian Serbs' "foreign minister," and along with Mr. Krajisnik was present as part of an unofficial Bosnian Serb delegation at the Dayton talks last year. Both men were described as being very angry when Mr. Milosevic, their formal representative at Dayton, showed them the agreement on the closing day in Ohio.

Mr. Holbrooke's two days of negotiations started when he arrived in Belgrade on Wednesday afternoon and told Mr. Milosevic that the Serb Democratic Party would be banned from the Bosnian elections and economic sanctions would be re-imposed on Serbia if Dr. Karadzic was not removed from the political scene.

Further pressure was applied on Dr. Karadzic by the Russians, often an ally of the Serbs. Moscow sent a message to him Thursday night suggesting that he step down, a senior Western diplomat said. The British sent a similar message, the diplomat said.

On the second elusive goal of his negotiations with Mr. Milosevic, the dispatch of Dr. Karadzic to The Hague, Mr. Holbrooke said he faced a stone wall.

Mr. Holbrooke said he informed Mr. Milosevic on Wednesday that Dr. Karadzic and the military leader of the Bosnian Serbs, Gen. Ratko Mladic, who is also indicted for war crimes, "have to go to The Hague." The answer, Mr. Holbrooke said, was: "They won't."

The envoy said there was "no chance" that Mr. Milosevic, whose security police force has heavily infiltrated the Bosnian Serb police and whose Yugoslav National Army formed the backbone of the Bosnian Serb army, would order the arrest of the two leaders.

"If we won't do it with 60,000 troops in the country, why would Milosevic do it and launch a Serb civil war?" Mr. Holbrooke said, referring to the number of NATO-led troops in Bosnia. "There are certain things he won't do."

Mr. Holbrooke's comments appeared to indicate that he believed the only way Dr. Karadzic would end up in The Hague was if he turned himself in or accidentally encountered NATO-led forces and they arrested him. NATO commanders, reflecting political instructions to avoid casualties, say they will not order their troops to search for Dr. Karadzic.

There has been some speculation among Western diplomats that Dr. Karadzic was toying with the idea of turning himself in to the tribunal. Dr. Karadzic is reported to have been paying very close attention to the televised proceedings of the tribunal.

The diplomats point out that Dr. Karadzic has also hired two criminal lawyers from law firms in the United States. These lawyers have been in The Hague monitoring proceedings and attacking the procedures, but they could possibly be sounding out prosecutors on the possibility of a plea bargain, the diplomats said.

General Mladic has become less of a target for Washington because since the signing of the Dayton accords, he has virtually disappeared into his military headquarters in eastern Bosnia and is rarely seen. Mr. Holbrooke apparently believes Dr. Karadzic will follow suit.