



**Hermes Institute of
International Affairs,
Security & Geoeconomy**

***SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE
AT A GLANCE***



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

“SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE” is a weekly review of the most significant current political, economic, energy, defense, and security news of Southeastern Europe. It covers 14 countries; Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. However Greece enjoys its own weekly review for a more detailed presentation of its current affairs (GREECE AT A GLANCE).

This ambitious newsletter aspires to become an informative “tool” for anyone who is interested in the region and wishes to have knowledge of the non-stop current developments and challenges. “HERMES” Institute is not a news agency and it is not one of its ambitions to become one but it is strongly believed that today’s events provide the necessary material to understand the future and to analyze situations that may affect in peace, stability, and growth of the region.

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ALBANIA: August 29th, the

President of Albania, Ilir Meta, reacted about the current rhetoric of changing the border between Serbia and Kosovo. Meta said that any discussion for accepting the reality will be welcome, but not for changing it, because that would provoke populist emotions and rhetoric that bring problems. *“The Serbia - Kosovo dialogue was built not to change the reality, but to lead in a process on behalf of peace and stability. It is a pre-condition for the European integration of both countries and any understanding that helps the acceptance of this reality, is welcome. Any deviation from this reality provokes populist rhetoric and emotions and brings nothing good. Balkan has seen great transformations in the past decades, which have been valued positively by the EU and USA. The independence of Kosovo and the dialogue with Serbia on behalf of peace and stability is one of the most successful investments in the region. The agreement that is expected to be reached between the parties should release positive energy,”* Meta said, adding that it is vital for the region to see no more images of families leaving their homes, either Serbians, or Albanians. As for the role of Albania, Meta said that it always supports the dialogue intermediated by the EU, which is expected to increase stability in the region. For Albania, according to Meta, it is important to see the principles of the Helsinki Accords and the OSCE principles for the security in Europe, and especially the principle for not changing borders. For Meta, Serbia will also benefit by an agreement with Kosovo, since good-neighboring relations are a necessary pre-condition for entering the EU. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

- August 31st, leader of the Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI) Monica Kryemadhi stated in a meeting with the National Steering Committee of party's youth that criminals are not afraid of state as they are in possession of it. *“They say that criminals are frightened by the state and the justice reform, but criminals shoot the houses of journalists. They are not afraid because the worst criminal leads the Government,”* Kryemadhi said. She underlined that Albanian salaries are being depreciated and poverty is increasing forcing Albanians to leave the country. Kryemadhi concluded that the state should pay attention to young people making them to stay in Albania and she warned for a *“hot September”* in Albanian politics. Kryemadhi's statements came just one day after unknown people shot with AK-47 “Kalashnikov” rifle ten bullets against father'shouse of crime reporter Klodiana Lala. The journalist follows organized crime and justice for more than a decade. According to her the attack is linked to her work, since she and her family had no known conflicts. Associations of journalists condemned the attack and called on Albania's authorities to find the perpetrators. Prime Minister Edi Rama also condemned the attack, calling it *“barbaric.”* However, Lulzim Basha, Head of the Democratic Party's (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD), said *“Government has links with criminals”* attributing the attack to this fact. *“This is a mafia message to journalists,”* Basha said. The EU Delegation in Albania, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Albania and the US Embassy in Tirana condemned the attack asking for a transparent and thorough investigation. (www.albaniandaily news.com, www.top-channel.tv, www.balkaninsight.com)

- August 31st, the Democratic Party's (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) leader, Lulzim Basha, confirmed that his party will run together with the Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI) in the next local elections. *"It is not a secret that the opposition will be united in the local elections. We will face all challenges together,"* Basha said. When asked about the possibility of co-governing with the socialists, Basha was categorically against it: *"There will be no co-governing with Edi Rama without ending the political catastrophe our country is facing,"* he said. (www.top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Albanian Government looks determined to strengthen its work in order to achieve its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU next year. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Vetting process is a decisive step against corruption which remains together with organized crime the most significant problems of the state. Lately, opposition voices claiming links between the Government and Edi Rama personally with organized crime are increasing raising questions over the power of "Albanian mafia" in the country and its influence in state's politics. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a "mother nation". The Albanian Government implied through the Minister of Foreign Affairs that it is opposed in scenarios of territorial exchanges or border changes between Serbia and Kosovo. However, things are more complicated since the Minister stated that his country will adopt the EU's stance in the case. Taking into consideration that the EU through the High Representative Federica

Mogherini unofficially claimed it will support territory exchange if both countries stay away from efforts to create ethnic homogenous states it is obvious that the Albanian Government does not make its stance clear. Albania maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and F.Y.R.O.M. Possible border changes may engage Albania in dangerous situations taking into consideration that it has the role of "protector" of Albanians in the region. Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.



BOSNIA &

HERZEGOVINA: August 28th, Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) Security Minister Dragan Mektic said in a press conference that he has reliable information that the Republica Srpska (RS) Government, headed by the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijalde-mokrataor - SNSD), is preparing serious incidents in Banja Luka before the elections (scheduled for October 7th, 2018). According to him authorities of RS plan a major turmoil on Oktober 7th, 2018 in order to prevent people of voting. Mectic claimed that several criminals are going to be involved in the incidents. *"I know it is going to happen in Banja Luka,"* Mectic said. The Minister criticized the RS Government, for dividing Serbs and that certain political formations in the RS, such as the Alliance for Changes, are called foreign mercenaries or subjects of Bakir Izetbegovic. He emphasized that no one else in Banja Luka can feel safe after the attack on a journalist of BN television and the murder of David Dragicevic. Mectic claimed that there is a possibility

journalists have discovered radioactive wastes arrived in Banja Luka putting into danger people's health and safety. *"The authorities are targeting and lynching, and then with the help of criminals committing crimes. It is well known who the criminals in Banja Luka are,"* Mektic said. (www.klix.ba)

- August 28th, according to the Federal Police Directorate (FUP) in the Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina (FB&H), there are no camps in which (para)military training is conducted. The Federal Ministry of Interior and FUP investigated the Association for the Development of Physical and Positive Characteristics "Asker" based in Sarajevo which activities have been the subject of media interest in the region. *"The aforementioned association organized a camp for its members in the complex of the Sports and Recreation Center Jelen, Jelah Field, Tesanj Municipality, including certain sports and excursions, but according to collected information not any kind of military training,"* the B&H Council of Ministers replied to the question of Mirsad Jonlagic, MP of B&H Parliamentary Assembly on the existence of terrorist camps in the country. In the same way, the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) announced that they do not have any information that there are camps for terrorists training in the territory of B&H. The Brcko District Police agreed with FUP and SIPA statements. Early this year, the Republika Srpska (RS) broadcaster (RTRS) and other media close to the RS authorities have assured the public that the "Asker" Association in Tesanj provides military training for children representing a threat to Serbs in B&H. Jonlagic requested such information from the state executive authorities, considering that the Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, and the European Parliament members

Tonina Picule, Marijana Petir and others, talked about Wahhabism, radical Islam and camps for training in B&H. (www.klix.ba)

- September 2nd, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) Denis Zvizdic, claimed that the latest statement by Republika Srpska (RS) President Milorad Dodik that *"When it comes to the issue of the border between Serbia and B&H, it will be as Serbia says,"* represents a new unscrupulous attack on the sovereignty of the country, the targeted collapse of good neighborly relations and deliberate provocation based on fake facts. Zvizdic underlined *"It is clear that regarding the issue of the border between B&H and Serbia, it will never be the way Serbia says."* Furthermore he said that *"Serbia and RS are not one and will never be."* According to him B&H is an internationally recognized state, consisting of Bosniaks (Muslims), Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats and other minority ethnicities, while the RS is only one of the two entities of the country, in line with the Dayton Accord, with clearly defined and limited competencies of a political-administrative unit within B&H, while all the features of the state belong to B&H. Regarding the issue of the borders only the legitimated institutions of the state are eligible to deal with in accordance with the interests of B&H preserving its sovereignty, territorial integrity and international legal substance. *"Dodik knows, but deliberately forgets, so it must be recalled that on May 22nd, 1992, B&H became a member of the United Nations, and that day from the standpoint of international law ended the process and completed any discussion around the borders of B&H. Therefore, the border between B&H and Serbia has been established, internationally recognized and confirmed by the Badinter*

Commission and the Dayton Peace Agreement, and can only be changed with the consent of both states, and not as Dodik dreams and insinuates on what Serbia says,” said Zvizdic.

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. General elections have been scheduled for October 7th, 2018 and it is assessed that nationalistic rhetoric will be increased for pre-electoral reasons. Security Minister announced that he has reliable information for tension and turmoil in RS during the elections setting an alarm for security situation of the state. The state's road towards its Euro-atlantic integration is full of obstacles and opening of negotiation talks with the EU should not be expected earlier than 2022. RS rhetoric for greater autonomy remains active and the current debate on border change and territorial exchanges between Serbia and Kosovo developed Serbian entity's "taste" for its case. More and more "voices" express concern over Russian influence in the Serbian entity not excluding security irregularities. Bosnia has become a field of influence's rivalry; Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Russia approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests. Major concerns over security situation and political stability in the state.



BULGARIA: August 29th,

Bulgaria continues to implements its Armed Forces modernization projects approving funds and publishing tenders. 13 T-72 will be repaired in the next five years, and the repair will cost about 5 million Euros, decided the Ministry of

Defense. In the meantime, the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense sent invitations to Russian United Aircraft Corporation and to Belarusian 558 Aircraft Repair Plant regarding their interest for providing maintenance and lifecycle extension services for the Su-25 fighter jets fleet (10 single-seat Su-25Ks, 4 twin-seat Su-25UBKs, and their 28 R-95Sh turbofan engines). The Ministry has published on August 21st, 2018 a tender inviting Russian and Belarusian state-owned companies to negotiate a framework agreement valid for 48 months to overhaul the Bulgarian Air Force's (BuAF's) Su-25 close air support aircrafts in 2019-22. The two companies were invited to provide their initial bids by September 10th, 2018 with negotiations scheduled to take place in Sofia two days later. (www.novinite.com)

- September 1st, the Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borissov said that the coalition Government council would meet on September 3rd, 2018 to discuss nominations for new Cabinet Ministers in the wake of three resignations, while he also hinted that further changes could follow. The Ministers of Interior, Transport and Regional Development, all from Borissov's Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (ГЕРБ, Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) party, resigned at his request on August 31st, 2018 over the Svoge bus crash six days earlier, in which 17 people died. After the announcement of the resignations the Deputy Prime Minister Valeri Simeonov, co-leader of Government minority partner the United Patriots (Обединени Патриоти) – a grouping of far-right and nationalist parties – and leader of the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (Национален фронт за спасение на България - NFSB) party, called his party for a meeting on September 1st, 2018 to decide whether to continue participating

in the governing coalition. Simeonov's move followed a series of tensions within the United Patriots, especially between Simeonov and Attack (Атака) party leader and United Patriots parliamentary leader Volen Siderov. These tensions have called into question the future of the United Patriots coalition, especially regarding the 2019 European Parliament and municipal elections in Bulgaria. Of the three parties in the United Patriots, only Siderov openly endorsed the resignations of the three ministers on August 31st, 2018. Borissov, speaking at a meeting of the youth wing of his party, said that it was necessary to take political responsibility not only for the Svoje accident but also for Police actions in an accident where President Roumen Radev's father Georgi was involved. An investigation was ordered by the Prosecutor General and the Interior Ministry after news emerged – several days after the incident – of a collision between a car driven by Georgi Radev and a man in a motorized wheelchair. Georgi Radev has denied culpability while the man in the motorized wheelchair was penalized by police. Questions also have been raised about the alleged involvement of a local leader of the opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (Българска социалистическа партия - BSP) – which backed President Radev's election – in Police handling of the incident. Borissov said that the events of recent weeks, including the Svoje bus crash and the Georgi Radev case, had shown that it was time for changes to the Government. In an apparent response to criticism from Simeonov that resignation of three Ministers had not been coordinated with the coalition partners, Borissov said that the Ministers were coming from GERB and cannot see any reason why their resignations should have been agreed with the coalition partners. The new Cabinet Ministers would come from GERB, but their

appointments would be thoroughly discussed in the coalition council, Borissov said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- September 2nd, Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister Valeri Simeonov's National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (Национален фронт за спасение на България - NFSB) party is to announce on September 3rd, 2018 its decision whether to stay part of Prime Minister Boiko Borissov's Government. Simeonov, a co-leader of the governing coalition minority partner the United Patriots (Обединени Патриоти) – a grouping of ultra-nationalist and far-right parties – made the announcement after his party held lengthy talks on September 1st and 2nd, 2018 on whether to stay in Borissov's Government. The NFSB held the meeting after Simeonov sharply criticized Borissov's decision to ask for the resignations of the Ministers of Interior, Transport and Regional Development because of the August 25th, 2018 Svoje bus crash, in which 17 people died and 21 were injured. However, reactions of the other two co-leaders of the United Patriots differed from Simeonov's. Attack (Атака) leader Volen Siderov supported the resignations, while Krassimir Karakachanov, a Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the Bulgarian National Movement (Българско Национално Движение – VMRO) party, said that the three Ministers were not guilty for the Svoje crash. Karakachanov, however, noted that the three Ministers were from the Borissov's GERB party and it was Borissov's decision to change Ministers from his party. On September 2nd, 2018 after the NFSB meeting Simeonov posted on social media an extensive criticism against Borissov and his party regarding the coalition Government. Simeonov accused Borissov of having a unilateral management style.

Decisions were not coordinated with the coalition partners and this was in contradiction with the coalition agreement, he said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

A sudden Government crisis has broken out due to the August 25th, 2018 bus crash which led in 17 deaths and 21 injured people. A party – the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria – from the minor partner - United Patriots – of the ruling coalition threatens to leave the Government. The possibility of snap elections is once again in the foreground. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Bulgaria presents an active development policy trying to exploit its resources and establish an attractive and stable investment environment. However, collapse of state's Company Register (and insolvency of the fourth largest insurer, Olympic) sets alarming signs for Bulgaria's functioning as a modern EU state (aiming at entering the eurozone). President Radev strengthens his rhetoric and criticism against the Government and the Prime Minister Borissov highlighting their different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Although modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc) military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: August 28th, the Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin, on his official visit to Germany. “*We are close friends of your country,*” said Merkel after meeting with Plenkovic, and added that Germany is interested in increasing cooperation with Croatia. She added that she knows Croatian Government is working on implementing reforms saying that these reforms are good for the development of the country and its people. Merkel said that Germany has good cooperation with Croatia in terms of migration, even though Croatia is still not part of the passport-free Schengen zone. “*You are doing a great job on the borders, and I wish to praise you for that,*” said Merkel. Plenkovic said that Germany is Croatia's largest trade partner, and added that some 2.5 million German tourists have visited the country since 2017. He also mentioned the role of Croats living in Germany, who are well integrated into German society. Plenkovic and Merkel said that Croatia and Germany will soon sign an action plan on strengthening political, economic and cultural relations. “*The action plan is being prepared and we are hammering out the details,*” Merkel said after talks with Plenkovic. The document is likely to be signed at a ministerial level in the coming months, according to Plenkovic. Merkel said she supports Croatia's aspirations to enter the EU's passport-free travel Schengen Area. “*When it comes to possible changing of borders in the Balkans, Croatia is cautious, as this could have an impact on the neighborhood,*” Plenkovic said. Merkel, who has recently reiterated that there has been no need to change the borderlines in the Western Balkans, agreed with Plenkovic's statement. Before his meeting with Merkel, Plenkovic held talks with

officials of the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- August 31st, Interior Minister Davor Bozinovic and director of the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center Charles Kable signed a memorandum of understanding through which Croatia will gain access to the US Terrorist Screening Database, which contains data on all people who may be linked to terrorism. The Ministry of the Interior said that the memorandum, signed in Dubrovnik, would step up cooperation between Croatian institutions and the US agency. *"The close cooperation between our two countries, in intelligence community as well as between institutions and law enforcement agencies, is encouraging, and I praise Croatia's wishes to contribute to the global fight against terrorism,"* Kable said. Based on the document, Croatia's Interior Ministry and the U.S Terrorist Screening Centre would share information aiming at preventing terrorist attacks, including information on transnational organized crime and other serious types of crime. The capabilities that have opened up by signing this agreement represent a powerful tool which increases the security levels of Croatian and American people, being a great step forward in the global fight against terror, against organized crime, but also illegal migration, Bozinovic said. The document signed today marks a continuation of strategic partnership and improvement of institutional cooperation between Croatia and the US in prevention and fight against serious crime, including terror, human and drug trafficking, corruption and organized crime. This cooperation was first agreed during Bozinovic's visit to the US earlier this year, and reaffirmed during a visit by US Attorney General Jeff Sessions to Croatia in May 2018. (www.hr.n1info.com)



Croatian Minister of Interior Davor Bozinovic and director of the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center Charles Kable sign the memorandum of understanding

(Photo source: www.mup.hr)

- August 31st, Croatia has earmarked over 3.2 million Euros in this year's state budget for projects of importance to Bosnia's ethnic Croats. A senior official of the Central State Office for Croats Abroad, Zvonko Milas, signed contracts with 105 beneficiaries of these funds. *"We must be unified even more and there is no border that could separate us. The projects funded by the Government of Croatia are only some of the models aiming at making us more committed to each other, bringing us closer together and ensuring a more dignified life to the future generations,"* said Milas at the contract signing ceremony in the central Bosnian town of Vitez. Croatian Government will finance cultural, educational, science, health, and other projects of interest to Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) for 2018, which is a clear message of unity and support with the goal of survival, Milas said. After the Government had earmarked 5.2 million Euros for aiding health care in B&H, more specifically to help the hospital in the city of Mostar repay its debts, today they decided to provide additional 3.2 million Euros, a record

amount in last five years. In the years 2013-2016, the Government had earmarked 2.6 million Euros for Croats in Bosnia, raising the amount to 3.1 million Euros in 2017. B&H Archbishop, Cardinal Vinko Puljic, said that Croat and Catholic identities in B&H were interrelated and that it was important to keep the unity of Croats in the two countries alive. *“Wherever the Catholic Church survives, the identity of Croat people will survive too,”* Puljic said, adding that Croats are one people regardless of where they live. Unity among Croats matters, said Dragan Covic, *Croat member of Bosnia’s tripartite Presidency. “We will continue building and creating the future together but I also hope we will recognize legitimate representatives of Croat people in Bosnia, who will know to protect our interests in the long run. Because this is our people and our homeland, and we must know how to preserve it,”* Covic said. Ethnic Croats of B&H are the third larger ethnic group in this country and are recognized by the Constitution as a constituent people, entitled to equal rights and representation in institutions as other two constituent peoples namely the Bosniaks (Muslims) and Serbs. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

It is estimated that political distance between the President and Government may affect political stability of the state. Border dispute on Piran Bay remains active and Slovenia’s initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. It is still a question how Croatia will react. Apart from that a new border conflict is emerged with Bosnia & Herzegovina regarding Peljesak Bridge. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone. Croatia implements a policy of

Armed Forces modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: August 28th, Turkey

plans to establish a sovereign naval base in the north of the island. According to the Turkish daily Yeni Safak, Turkey’s Navy has submitted a proposal to the “Foreign Ministry” in the north for the establishment of the base. Such a base in the north would ensure the “sovereign rights” of the breakaway regime, the daily said, but also the rights and interests of Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean. A naval base would also reinforce the position of the so-called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” and Turkey at the settlement negotiations and it could take measures to prevent actions concerning offshore energy areas. Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot side oppose Cyprus’ energy plans in the island’s Exclusive Economic Zone. A proposal for the establishment of a naval base in the north by Turkey was first put on the table in 2009 after the establishment of the “Andreas Papandreou” airbase in Paphos in 1998 and the signing in 2000 between Cyprus and Greece of a joint defense doctrine, the Turkish daily said. If there is a decision to implement this project Turkey would establish a sovereign naval base in the north like Britain has established two bases in the south of the island in 1960. According to the Turkish daily such a base would offset Cypriot and Greek influence in the region, as the two counties are forging cooperation and partnerships *“To dominate over the Mediterranean energy fields.”* The eastern Mediterranean has become one of the most critical regions in the world in terms of energy and military security, the daily said, and given the strategic position of Cyprus, Turkey is trying to

gain a leading role in the future developments of the region. It is said that western powers, especially the U.S and Britain, had increased their military presence in the eastern Mediterranean due to the war in Syria while Russia, France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Canada, Portugal, Greece, and Denmark have anchored their war ships in the region too. It added that Turkey does not have an air base in the north either and that efforts were underway to meet the Turkish army's needs using the civilian airport at Lefkoniko, which is currently closed. (www.cyprus-mail.com, www.yenisafak.com)

- August 29th, a joint Search and Rescue (SAR) Exercise, titled “CYFRA-03/18” was conducted near Cyprus coast, with participation of SAR units and personnel of Cyprus and France. According to a press release issued by Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC) Larnaca, the exercise was conducted within the framework of cooperation development, aiming at confronting successfully Search and Rescue incidents or emergency situations that might arise during operations within Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone as well as rescue of refugees. The French frigate “CHEVALIER PAUL”, fast patrol boat “TSOMAKIS” of the Navy Command of National Guard, and air assets (helicopters of Cyprus Police Aviation Unit) participated in the Aeronautical SAR Exercise under the operational control and coordination of the Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC) Larnaca, in close cooperation with the French Navy. The scenario dealt with a simulated “Maritime Accident and rescue of a boat with shipwrecked people, resulting the immediate implementation of the Cyprus National SAR Operational Plan “NEARCHOS” by the JRCC Larnaca in order to address situation. SAREX “CYFRA-03/18” is the

third exercise for 2018, conducted within the framework of a long-lasting cooperation, between the JRCC Larnaca (which represents the SAR system of the Republic of Cyprus) and the French Navy. (www.mod.gov.cy)



Joint SAR exercise between Cyprus and France
(Photo source: www.mod.gov.cy)

- September 2nd, consultations carried out by Jane Holl Lute, the UN Secretary-General's envoy on Cyprus, will determine whether all interested parties desire a settlement to the Cyprus problem, Foreign Minister Nicos Christodoulides said. Following the failure of talks in Switzerland last year, UN chief Antonio Guterres appointed Lute to look into the positions of all interested parties on the way forward. Lute will brief Guterres this month and he will decide whether to call for a new round of talks. *“This process will determine whether all of us really wish for the resumption of the talks from where they left off in Crans-Montana that would lead us to a solution to the Cyprus problem,”* Christodoulides said. Lute has already met President Nicos Anastasiades, Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. Christodoulides said that Anastasiades would meet Guterres on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly later this month in New York. Asked to comment on threats by Cavusoglu in an interview with the Greek daily “Ta Nea”, concerning the

developments in the field of energy, Christodoulides said: *“Threats wherever they come from are a sign of weakness. We will not act through threats nor grand statements or impressive moves but we will continue with the unobstructed implementation of our energy plans and nothing more,”* Christodoulides concluded. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus expresses in highest level its commitment to react decisively against possible Turkish provocations regarding its intentions to exploit energy resources in Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). It is estimated that coming autumn may be a period of high tension while a “hot” security incident should not be excluded. Cyprus promotes drills in its EEZ while Turkey is ready to react if it assesses that its EEZ (or the Turkish Cypriot EEZ) is violated it by the Cypriots. Plans for a new naval base in north Cyprus by Turkish forces is a strong sign of empowerment and quality upgrading of military presence in the island. Definitely such plans and actions do not facilitate peace talks; on the contrary, they prevent them. However, peace talks may start soon again while the new UN envoy continues its active efforts aiming at restarting talks. The U.S – Turkey tension may affect directly Cyprus in the fields of defense and security. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security.



F.Y.R.O.M: August 28th, *“The Government wishes for the upcoming referendum to be carried out in a friendly atmosphere so*

citizens to come out voting for the future of Macedonia [F.Y.R.O.M],” the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev said. The country must seize this unique, historic opportunity to become part of the European family claimed Zaev. *“Reaching an agreement with Greece after 27 years on such a sensitive issue was not easy. However, this agreement has opened the EU doors for economic prosperity, and maintenance of territorial integrity of our little tiny country,”* Zaev said expressing his view that referendum will be successful. (www.mia.mk)

- August 29th, F.Y.R.O.M expects to become a full NATO member in the first quarter of 2020, the National Coordinator Stevo Pendarovski said in a press conference. In the next few months F.Y.R.O.M should confirm that it accepts all provisions of NATO founding treaty. *“We expect accession talks to be completed by the end of this year and then it is up to Greece and the other NATO member states’ Parliaments to ratify the accession agreement. Ratification process needs almost a year, so F.Y.R.O.M may become full NATO member in the first quarter of 2020,”* Pendarovski said. He also underlined that the Government adopted a concept for the National Structure aiming at accelerating F.Y.R.O.M’s accession process. Structure will include three bodies; the highest one is NATO Integration Committee, the second is NATO Integration Working Group, and the last one is Secretariat for Operational/Logistic Plan. The Prime Minister Zoran Zaev will chair the first body which is to bring together officials of all state level institutions that are related to F.Y.R.O.M accession process towards NATO. Finally, Pendarovski announced that the state budget will include 0.1 – 0.2% of Gross Domestic Product

(GDP) or 500,000 Euros for NATO. (www.mia.mk)

- September 2nd, coalition “United for European Macedonia*” [*F.Y.R.O.M] launched its pre-referendum campaign in the city of Kocani. The Prime Minister Zoran Zaev emphasized to the overall benefits of the country’s accession to the EU and NATO. *“Voting in favor of the name agreement to the coming referendum means access of the country to the European market, EU funds in the fields of infrastructure, agriculture, and reforms in Judiciary,”* Zaev said. Speaking about the Athens – Skopje name agreement, Zaev claimed that some politicians try to persuade citizens that it is detrimental for their “Macedonian” identity and language adding that the agreement document is accessible for everyone. *“Our duty is to provide stability, security, and economic prosperity for the country, for us, and the future generations. This is why I expect referendum to be successful. Every citizen should vote, even if he votes against. These people who will stay at home or boycott referendum will send a message that they are against Macedonia* [*F.Y.R.O.M] and its future. By signing the friendship agreement with Bulgaria and the name agreement with Greece we made new friends who support us instead of being obstacles towards state’s effort to enter the EU and NATO,”* Zaev said. The Prime Minister announced that next 30 days (until the September 30th, 2018 referendum) it will be launched a series of public rallies informing citizens about the benefits of a successful referendum. However, the opposition Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-

DPMNE sent a letter to the Parliament Speaker Talat Xhaferi claiming that the Government’s decision to fund referendum campaign from the national budget is an “autocratic” action against citizens’ interest. So far 71 one MPs out of 120 announced their support to the coming referendum. (www.mia.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Zaev’s Government intensifies its efforts towards a successful referendum scheduled for September 30th, 2018. For Zaev it is not only a matter of EU and NATO accession but it is related directly with peace and stability of his country. Especially in a period with alarming signals by neighboring countries such as Serbia and Kosovo and scenarios of border changes or “corrections”, F.Y.R.O.M needs internal stability. A possible failure in the coming referendum means topple of Zaev’s Government and political turmoil. However, it is assessed that referendum will be successful approving the F.Y.R.O.M – Greece agreement over the name issue. VMRO-DPMNE’s behavior during the referendum is a question; it looks trapped by its political interests namely its nationalistic rhetoric which not allows it to compromise. It is estimated that VMRO-DPMNE will maintain “creative neutrality” towards referendum. Country enters in a difficult and strange period where political and security destabilization is not an unlikely scenario but Zaev demonstrates political intelligence and flexibility in order to avoid it.



GREECE: August 27th, two former Turkish navy Special Forces commandos accused of taking part in an assassination attempt against the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

during the failed coup attempt in 2016 are being kept in a secret and high-security location in Greece, Halit Cetin and Fatih Arik were freed last week from custody after their maximum 18-month remand, without trial, expired. Nevertheless, Greek authorities moved them to a secure location until their asylum requests are considered by independent judicial authorities. The pair reportedly fled over the border to Greece and requested asylum in February 2017, several months after the failed July 2016 coup and military threat to Erdogan. Their case is unrelated to the eight Turkish officers and NCOs that fled to Greece aboard a Turkish Army MEDEVAC helicopter immediately after the coup in Turkey was snuffed out. Asylum requests have already been granted to the eight Turks at the first instance level. They were freed but still remain under police protection in Greece. (www.naftemporiki.gr, www.aa.com.tr)

- August 28th, the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras reshuffled his cabinet appointing a former New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) minister and MP as the Deputy Minister for Citizens' Protection, and a former Hellenic Socialist Movement (Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα – PASOK) party Secretary and Minister as an out-of-Parliament Minister for the “administrative restructuring” portfolio. As expected, Finance Minister Euclides Tsakalotos, Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias and Defense Minister Panos Kammenos, Tsipras's coalition partner, kept their posts. The key changes were the shift of Deputy Defense Minister Fotis Kouvelis to Shipping Minister and the inclusion of independent MP Katerina Papakosta as Deputy Citizens' Protection Minister under Olga Gerovassili. Gerovassili was replaced as Administrative Reform Minister by former socialist Minister Mariliza

Xenogiannakopoulou. Other new names included Michalis Kalogirou as Justice Minister, replacing Stavros Kontonis, and Alexis Haritsis as Interior Minister. (www.kathimerini.com, www.naftemporiki.gr)

- August 31st, the United Nations (UN) refugee agency called on Greek authorities to speed up the transfer of eligible asylum-seekers to the mainland, saying the situation at an overcrowded reception center on Lesbos island is reaching “boiling point.” Lesbos, not far from Turkey in the northeast Aegean Sea, is the preferred entry point into the European Union in 2015 for nearly a million Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis, who still comprise about 70% of a far lower rate of new arrivals. More than 7,000 asylum-seekers and migrants – a quarter of them children – are crammed into shelters at the island's Moria reception center, built for 2,000, Charlie Yaxley of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) told a briefing. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling coalition of SYRIZA – ANEL intensifies its efforts to reverse political atmosphere after the devastating wildfires in Attica socked Greek society. Government's reshuffle aimed at changing positively political thermometer but also opening SYRIZA's field in centre and centre-left voters. Apart from that strengthened its coalition partner ANEL and maintained political balance within Tsipras party. The Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras plans to announce a “social package” next week during the opening ceremony of the International Exhibition of Thessaloniki in an effort to totally change current political agenda. It is more than obvious that the country enters in

a far pre-electoral period and it is a question when the Government plans to call for elections. Although Tsipras and his officials say that election will be held in autumn 2019 there are thoughts that snap elections may be announced autumn 2018 or spring of 2019. Early elections together with the local and European one scheduled for May 2019 is a possible scenario. However, none could exclude the possibility of ANEL withdrawal from the Government when the Greece – F.Y.R.O.M agreement would come to the Parliament for ratification namely during autumn 2018 or beginning of 2019. The scenario of early parliamentary election on September – October 2018 could not be excluded but under current circumstances it could be “painful” for ruling coalition. Greece – Turkey under “low level” tension with a lot of open issues which easily may turn into major crisis.



KOSOVO: August 29th, Kosovo opposition parties have called for an extraordinary parliamentary session on September 4th, 2018 to put a resolution to a vote which they say will protect the country’s territorial integrity amid controversial suggestions of a land swap with Serbia as part of a final deal between Pristina and Belgrade. Resolution will confirm that “*Nobody has the mandate to negotiate on Kosovo’s territory*,” wrote on social media Avdullah Hoti, Chief of the opposition Democratic League of Kosovo, (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) parliamentary group. Hoti also welcomed support of the initiative from two other opposition parties, Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) and the Social Democratic Party, (Partia Socialdemokrate e Kosovës – PSD). In order to call an extraordinary parliamentary session, 40 MPs’ signatures are required. Initiative by the Kosovo opposition

came after an announcement that the Presidents of Kosovo and Serbia, Hashim Thaci and Aleksandar Vucic, will meet on September 7th, 2018. Opposition worried by recent statements of Thaci about “border correction” with Serbia. Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj expressed support for an extraordinary session. The Speaker of Parliament Kadri Veseli, who is the Head of the ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Demokratike e Kosovës – PDK), said that the initiative for calling the extraordinary session “*Represents politically an absurd and totally unnecessary act about a topic which it has been said will be discussed.*” (www.balkaninsight.com)

- August 30th, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci said that a proposal for ethnic Albanians living in southern Serbia’s Presevo Valley to join Kosovo will be one of the topics at his EU-mediated meeting with his Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vucic on September 7th, 2018 in Brussels. “*Whether it pleases anyone or not, I will even officially address the request of the Albanians of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac for that part to join Kosovo,*” Thaci said. He added that the idea of a border correction would address “*The injustices that have been done to Albanian people.*” Suggestions of a territorial swap between Kosovo and Serbia as part of a final deal to normalize relations, with Kosovo receiving the Presevo Valley and Serbia getting Serb-majority northern Kosovo, have become increasingly controversial in recent week. But Thaci insisted that any partition of Kosovo would not be acceptable. Thaci’s comments came after a whirlwind day of meetings, during which he sat down twice with Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, Speaker of Parliament Kadri Veseli and Deputy Premiers Fatmir Limaj and Dardan

Gashi. During the day, Thaci has also held a joint meeting with the US ambassadors to Pristina and Belgrade, Greg Delawie and Kyle Scott, at which the Brussels dialogue with Serbia was discussed. Two hours later Thaci also had a phone conversation with the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Wess Mitchell about the current situation. Mitchell also had a phone conversation with the Serbia's Vucic about the same topic. Thaci's latest statements about a "border correction" have caused the Kosovo opposition to propose a resolution saying that no one has a mandate to negotiate about Kosovo's territory. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- September 1st, any border changes or exchanges of territory in the Balkans would lead to new tragedies, Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said in Dubrovnik in a comment on current discussions on a possible exchange of territory between Serbia and Kosovo. Haradinaj statements were made on the sidelines of an international conference in Dubrovnik, and the Croatian host, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic called too for respect of the existing borders. "Any border change or territory exchange would trigger new tragedies in the Balkans, cause instability and undermine long-term political and security investments in peace in Kosovo and the rest of the region," said Haradinaj. His statement was supported by Croatian Prime Minister Plenkovic. "Today we have sent messages that borders need to be respected and that changes that could destabilize our neighborhood are not good," he said. However, a few days earlier on August 27th, 2018 the European Commission Spokesperson, Maja Kocijancic, underlined that no one in the EU will become an obstacle if Kosovo and Serbia find a mutual agreement. Actually, three days after the White House

adviser for National Security, John Bolton, made it clear that the USA will not try to stop a territory exchange between Kosovo and Serbia, if Pristina and Belgrade find an agreement the EU keeps the same line. (www.rs.n1info.com, www.top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo – Serbia negotiations enters in a critical phase. Border exchange is on the table and what were just unofficial leaks a few days earlier becomes more official through President Thaci statements. It seems that the U.S factor has a leading role in the background pushing for such a solution. Presevo Valley with a significant Albanian minority goes to Kosovo and Northern Kosovo with Serb majority will become Serbian territory. Thaci will put such proposal on the table on September 7th, 2018. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. A mutual accepted agreement between Kosovo and Serbia is the critical point for the country in order to start approaching the Euro-Atlantic integration. Kosovo army issue is a case which may cause tension with Serbia and it seems that the state seeks to accelerate actions towards transformation of KSF into a regular army. It is assessed that international community namely the EU and NATO will not allow such development at least as long as both countries are willing to talk for an agreement.



MOLDOVA: August 27th, Strong protests have broken out in Moldova's capital Chisinau. Extensive corruption and cancelation of

the recent local elections in Chisinau triggered citizen's reaction. More specifically, Court decided to invalidate the election of a pro-European candidate to the Chisinau city hall race. Andrei Nastase, the leader of the Dignity and Truth Platform (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) unexpectedly defeated the pro-Russian candidate in the June 2018 elections. However, the result was canceled by the Court because Nastase broadcast a live broadcast on social media on election day, urging citizens to vote. Court's decision was criticized by the EU, Canada and the US considering it a threat against the Moldovan democracy. Citizens also protested against power held by billionaire businessman Vladimir Plahotniuc, who is the leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM). His party was fourth in the Moldovan general election four years ago, with 15.8% of the vote, but now it has come to power. Alexandru Damian, from the Romanian Center for European Policies, believes that ties of the PDM with pro-Russian lawmakers cause alarm signals in the West. The EU has reacted against Moldova's political situation by freezing on July 2018 a 100 million Euros fund due to deterioration of democratic governance in the country. *“For first time, after the European Parliament resolution, the anti-EU rhetoric, which is generally associated with the Socialist Party, was adopted by PDM and the media controlled by its leader Plahotniuc,”* Damian said. During protests policemen clashed with angry anti-government protesters. People say that uniformed officers and civilian officers brutally forced them to stop their peaceful protest throughout the night. Amnesty International Moldova expressed its concerns about the actions of Police which violently evicted the peaceful protesters around the Stefan Cel Mare monument

and the “Guguga” cafe without any motivated reasons. (www.jurnal.md)

- August 29th, for the first time since the fall of the Moldovan Communist regime (2009), MFA in Bucharest summoned Moldovan Ambassador, Mihai Gribincea, for explanations regarding blocking the access of several Romanian citizens to the Republic of Moldova. Moldovan Border Police banned on August 27th, 2018 Romanian citizens participating in the “Centenary Marsh” crossing the state border on the grounds because *“It disturbed the public order in the border area, in violation of the regime of the crossing points.”* The march (a commemorative action to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Great Union) began on July 1st, 2018 in Alba Iulia, a symbolic city of the Centenary, and should end on September 1st, 2018 in Chisinau after 1,300 kilometers on foot. At the same time, the Embassy of Romania in Chisinau, has taken steps to ensure that Romanian citizens enjoy their legal rights *“As is normal in a state in association with the EU and a strategic partnership with Romania.”* Only on August 28th, 2018 Romanian participants were allowed to cross the border with Moldova, but without their leader George Simion. *“Simion George has been banned to enter Moldova in accordance with the law, after demonstrating aggressive, inappropriate behavior and refusing to comply with the legal procedures for crossing the state border,”* the Border Police of Moldova announced. The Moldovan - Romanian relationship improved substantially after the fall of Vladimir Voronin's Communist regime in 2009. (www.jurnal.md)

- August 31st, the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee discussed a report regarding reforms in Moldova in accordance with the EU – Moldova Association Agreement. According to

the report democracy is degrading and justice still remains under the influence of politics. *“The outcome of the 2014-2018 reforms is unfortunately disappointing. The gradual degradation of democratic institutions, especially in the last two years, is linked to the fact that Moldova is perceived as a captive state where it is controlled by Vladimir Plahotniuc, the richest oligarch and leader of the ruling party [Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM)],”* said expert Kamil Calus, who presented the report. Calus emphasized that the legal and institutional framework has improved in various areas, but situation of justice, and of democratic standards, either have not improved or have been deteriorated. Report claims that Moldovan justice is one of the least reformed institutions. *“Judiciary is extremely corrupted showing a servile attitude towards specific business and political groups. Key institutions are subordinated to the PD leader. Judiciary is politicized being a tool against political and business opponents. Investigations are being launched against civic activists, especially over the past few months. The Government uses corrupted practices, business clan connections and intimidation against justice. Constitutional Court is highly politicized. The Government has not made any attempt to increase independence of the Constitutional Court. Independence of the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office is doubtful; it is subordinated to the General Prosecutor's Office, which remains under control of Plahotniuc,”* the report claims. (www.jurnal.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political life is “hostage” of the pro-Russian President Igor Dodon and pro-Western

Government rivalry which undermines the institutional function of the country. In the wider framework Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. Political situation in the country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which will strengthen state's transparency, accountability and democratic values. Invalidation of local elections in Chisinau by the Constitutional Court badly affected state's profile and mainly relations with the EU. Moreover, the Government is sliding into dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime. The U.S, EU and IMF express their major concerns. By autumn the state will enter in pre-election period although elections are scheduled for February 24th, 2019. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: August 29th,

former President of the Civic Movement United Reform Action (Građanski Pokret Ujedinjena reformska - GP URA), Neeljko Rudovic, announced talks about the unification of the pro-Montenegrin opposition forces, organizations and individuals which would result in the formation of the Montenegrin opposition alliance. Since the opposition pillar in Montenegro is too fragmented, it cannot be expected changes soon. Journalists asked if URA would be part of that union and Rudovic said that he would remain member of that party as long as he believes that there is a chance that this party might come back to its original objective. He lost hope that political representatives of our citizens who were against the independence of Montenegro would now be

dedicated to their country. *“Instead of civil Montenegro, a country respected by everybody, they are still trying to turn it into a dominantly Serbian country. That’s a regressive policy which has denial of Montenegrin identity at its core. We all have to adopt some attitude about that policy. And that means that there’s no way that the Government will be constituted according to the model used so far. Key functions at all levels at the moment of the change of the Government can be performed only by those who have the best references, and who are dedicated to reinforce Montenegro and heal Montenegrin society,”* said Rudovic. (www.cdm.me)

- August 31st, a Reconnaissance force of the Army of Montenegro, and one Staff Officer will be sent to NATO mission in Latvia, within the Reconnaissance Platoon of the Army of Slovenia and under Canadian command. Engagement of this force will start from the beginning of 2019, by the principle of rotation, for a period of six months, and necessary funds in the amount of 400.000 Euros will be provided from 2019 state’s budget. *“This will further improve cooperation with the armed forces of our allies. We will achieve greater level of training, gain new experience and knowledge. This will also help achieve NATO standards and procedures, which will enhance military capabilities and interoperability,”* it was said by the Ministry of Defense. Details about the participation of the Montenegrin Army in Iraq are not known yet. Montenegro, as NATO member, decided to actively and responsibly take part in decision-making process of NATO Alliance as well as its operations. There is, therefore, possibility that soldiers of the Army of Montenegro join NATO forces in Iraq. (www.cdm.me)

- September 1st, 33 Montenegro soldiers will join the NATO-led military exercise “Trident Juncture 2018” next month in Norway, the Montenegrin Defense Ministry announced. “These soldiers will have their own equipment, the G36 assault rifle and they are going to use vehicles TAM 110,” the Ministry reported. Over 40,000 participants, about 130 aircraft and 70 vessels from 29 nations will take part in one of the largest military exercise during October and November in central and eastern Norway. “Trident Juncture 2018” will have an Article 5 (collective defense) scenario and will be under the command of Admiral James G. Foggo, Commander of Joint Force Command Naples. NATO Alliance claims all OSCE member states have been informed about the event, adding that Moscow was informed about the training at the last meeting of the NATO - Russia Council (NRC). (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Major reforms should be implemented in order the country to come closer to the EU. Montenegro shows activity within NATO not only because decided to send troops in Kosovo, but also because plans to join NATO forces in Latvia and Poland. Although the state fulfills its obligations as a full member of the Alliance questions are raised for such initiatives due to their impact in Montenegro’s society but also in country’s foreign relations. A large number of people is opposed in NATO and maintains pro-Russian stance while Montenegro’s presence in Kosovo may harm relations with Serbia.



ROMANIA: August 27th, the U.S.

Air Force plans to spend about 40 million dollars on new construction and base improvements at

the 71st Air Base in Campia Turzii, in Romania's Cluj County. The U.S. and Romanian air forces train together at the base in Campia Turzii, with the U.S. Air Force temporarily stationing F-15 and A-10 aircrafts for training and cooperation with the Romanian side. The 40 million dollars construction bill includes items from fiscal years 2015-2019 and would be paid by Defense Department funds specially allocated to deter Russian aggression. Most of the money, namely 25 million dollars, will be spent on infrastructure to directly enable mission planning and flight operations. In the meanwhile, the U.S. Air Force has already spent almost 6 million dollars to repaint, repair and reseal one runway, as well as to build a new hangar that could be used to house drones like the MQ-9 Reaper. However, the U.S. Air Forces plans more changes. For example, a section of the Campia Turzii air base currently housing a number of aircraft shelters and a maintenance apron will be massively extended by the end of next summer. A hangar capable of fitting an F-15 or A-10 and an extended aircraft ramp that can enable 12 F-15s to be parked outside are to be added to the place. Also, the U.S. Air Force plans to build a new squadron operation facility for 3.4 million dollars with briefing rooms and offices for medical and life-support personnel. Other projects include the construction of a cargo ramp that will be able to accommodate at least one C-5 or two C-17s, and an investment of 2.1 million dollars to upgrade a trim pad to meet NATO requirements. Last week, two stealth F-22 Raptor fighters belonging to the U.S. Air Force joined a training exercise at the Campia Turzii military base in central Romania. (www.defensenews.com, www.romania-insider.com)

- August 28th, it is worrying that a confrontation about principles has led to polarization of politics and society in Romania for a year and a half the German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said at the Annual Meeting of the Romanian Diplomacy. *"The voice of Europe in the world will only be respected if we are credible. Any double standards will be immediately used by opponents. Europe has to put into practice the values it has written on its flag – democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights and freedom of the press. That is why every member country is responsible and we all represent Europe abroad, we will all be measured by these standards,"* Maas said. Romania has seen many street protests since early-2017, after the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) won the power in the country, with protesters being mainly unhappy with the justice reforms proposed by the Government. (www.romania-insider.com)

- August 31st, Romania's Research and Innovation Minister Nicolae Burnete resigned. This is the first resignation of a Minister from the Government led by Viorica Dancila. *"My resignation is irrevocable and, at least at this moment, it will not be the subject of a press conference,"* Burnete announced, according to a press release from his Ministry. Several leaders of the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) allegedly complained about work of several Ministers, including Research Minister Nicolae Burnete. Prime Minister Viorica Dancila said that a Government reshuffle is not among the topics to be discussed at the PSD's Executive Committee meeting this weekend, as no ministerial evaluation has been made, according. However, when asked if she is satisfied with the Ministers' work, Dancila said she would be able to answer that question only

after an evaluation is made. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government continues in the field of Justice. The Venice Commission expressed its concerns over independence of state's judiciary taking into consideration the promoted amendments on judicial legislation. Iohannis strongly opposes in Government's plans to intervene in judicial system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state's justice. The EU keeps an eye in Romanian political developments. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning is becoming an advanced base close to Russia.



SERBIA: August 27th, the Mayor of Medvedja, Nebojsa Arsic said he had not heard from the Albanian representatives that they seek to join Kosovo. Medvedja is not a part of Presevo valley. The majority of municipality's population is Serbian. *"There is no ethnic animosity here. There are no exclusively 'Serbian' or 'Albanian' restaurants, people spend time together, congratulate religious holidays to each other...It is an example of a functioning multi-ethnic coexistence,"* Arsic said. He claimed that delineation is a subject for the highest state authorities and that state bodies are authorized to talk about rights of Albanians from this region of Serbia. According to the last census conducted in 2011, Medvedja has a population of 7,742 inhabitants of which there are a bit over 500 Albanians. There are also small minorities of Montenegrin and Roma people. (www.b92.net)

- August 28th, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said in a meeting with delegation of German Bundestag that Serb-Albanian agreement is of crucial importance for both sides. Vucic talked with the Deputy Chairman of the CDU/CSU faction in the German Parliament, Johann Wadephul and the group's foreign affairs adviser Hans-Joachim Falenski about bilateral relationship, Serbia's road to EU and the situation in the region. Wadephul, a member of the Bundestag, said he had great confidence in Serbia's integration process, he applauded the readiness of Belgrade and Pristina to continue the dialogue, but he also emphasized Chancellor Merkel's firm stance about being against changing borders. Vucic pointed out that Serbia had chosen to work on a compromise for Kosovo, for the sake of peaceful future for both entities and the region, and which would, at the same time, protect the state and its national interests. Vucic said he was glad that Serbia and Germany enjoy the best relations ever in history characterized by mutual trust. This fact was mirrored in the significant development of economic cooperation and increase in German investments, noted Vucic. Vucic emphasized the importance of the Berlin process, initiated by Chancellor Merkel, for peace and stability in the Western Balkans. (www.b92.net)

- August 30th, the fact that Angela Merkel and Donald Trump discussed Kosovo and gave their support to ongoing talks on the Kosovo issue is a great step forward, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic said things have changed in favor of Serbia. *"We are still facing a great struggle and from those who need to be persuaded further, Germany is the most important,"* Dacic said. He also commented the recent statements from Pristina, including Kosovo's President Hashim

Thaci saying that he was against ethnic borders. *“Pristina has lost Western support; the attitude that everything is settled is gone. They can't seem to understand it, that's why different opinions coming from the Western countries and recent revokes of Kosovo independence affect them so bad,”* Dacic said. German Blic daily writes that the recent statement from Croatia Prime Minister Andrei Plenkovic that he was in favor of *“respecting the existing borders”* citing the opinion of Badinter Arbitration Committee caught the attention of Serbian public. (www.b92.net)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Relative security stability. Serbia's path towards the EU and NATO goes through Kosovo case resolution. Although dialogue has started in Brussels is full of obstacles which undermine establishment of confidence and good will between two parties. However, Vucic's statements show that Serbia is ready to compromise recognizing that it cannot gain everything through negotiations. The scenario of partition and exchanging territories is not a new one but it sounds more as a communicative trick than a realistic solution. Actions of ethnic minorities in Serbia such as Albanians in south Serbia or Muslim Bosnians in Sandzak region touch the sensitive issue of national security of the state. By expressing neutrality and maintaining equal distance from the U.S.A and Russia it moves in an environment of fragile balance.



SLOVENIA: August 29th, leaders of five parties signed an agreement to form a ruling coalition, which actually will establish a minority Government in Slovenia. *“Only results*

are worthwhile,” underlined the new Prime Minister Marjan Sarec and focused on the hard work of the ministerial team. After more than two months of talks, the Presidents of the List of Marjan Sarec (Lista Marjana Šarca - LMS), Social Democrats (Socialni Demokrati – SD), Modern Centre Party (Stranka Modernega Centra – SMC), Party of Alenka Bratusek (Stranka Alenke Bratušek - SAB), and Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratska Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) signed an agreement on forming a coalition Government led by LMS leader Marjan Sarec. *“There will be more tolerance, more understanding, and more talks behind closed doors in this Government. If we do so, the first Slovene minority Government has the possibility to reach a four-year term implementing the coalition agreement,”* said SD Head Dejan Zidan. DeSUS President Karl Erjavec expressed satisfaction with the coalition agreement, especially because health care and the rights of pensioners were placed on the priority list. Coalition's parties enjoy support of 43 MPs in the Slovenian Assembly of 90 seats and the Government will implement its mandate as long as will enjoy The Left (Levica) party support. *“As long as Ministers work in accordance with the agreement The Left will support the Government,”* the party's coordinator Luka Mesec said. (www.dnevnik.si)



Leaders of LMS, SD, SMC, SAB, and DeSUS sign a coalition agreement
(Photo source: www.trankalms.si)

- August 30th, the new Prime Minister Marjan Sarec submitted to the National Assembly a list of ministerial candidates. The 13th Slovenian Government includes 16 candidates representing the coalition List of Marjan Sarec (Lista Marjana Šarca - LMS), Social Democrats (Socialni Demokrati – SD), Modern Centre Party (Stranka Modernega Centra – SMC), Party of Alenka Bratusek (Stranka Alenke Bratušek - SAB), and Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS). Hearings of ministerial candidates from competent working bodies will take place next week. (www.dnevnik.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

LMS's initiative to form a coalition Government was successful bringing strong signs of political stability in the country. Although the new Government is a minority one enjoying support of The Left party looks determined to implement its mandate focusing in social care. After a long period of uncertainty and substantial lack of governance Sarec's Government may work on Slovenian economy, foreign affairs, and social care.



TURKEY: August 29th, Turkey and Azerbaijan should strengthen solidarity and collaboration in the region, Parliament Speaker Binali Yıldırım said during his official visit in Azerbaijan. *“Turkey and Azerbaijan share the same faith in the same region. There are some serious plans in our region nowadays,”* said Yıldırım at a meeting with his Azerbaijani counterpart Oktay Asadov. *“We need to increase our solidarity and collaboration against these plans. We need to have a firm stance against*

those who want to destabilize our region,” added the Turkish Parliament Speaker. Asadov said Azerbaijan wants to further increase bilateral relations with Turkey. *“Last year, bilateral trade volume was 2.6 billion dollars while in the first half of this year reached 1.9 billion dollars. Our Presidents seeks to increase these numbers. We will work more for this goal,”* Asadov added. During his visit Yıldırım was received by the Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Novruz Memmedov. (www.dailysabah.com)

- August 30th, the Manbij roadmap in Syria is *“moving forward,”* Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said. Speaking at a military promotion ceremony at the Turkish General Staff headquarters in capital Ankara, Akar said *“The Manbij roadmap is moving forward even if slowly. We constantly remind our counterparts about the necessity of withdrawal of the YPG/PKK from the region.”* The Manbij deal between Turkey and the U.S. focuses on the withdrawal of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) armed group from the city in order to stabilize the region. Speaking about situation in Syria's Idlib, Akar said *“Turkey strives for ensuring security, preventing attacks, giving aid to nearly 3.5-4 million people in Syria's Idlib without violating the cease-fire.”* On the Turkish military's success against both internal and external terror threats, Akar said that Turkish troops have neutralized some 3,000 Daesh terrorists in Operation “Euphrates Shield” along with 5,000 militants during Operation “Olive Branch”. *“We are the only country to fight against Daesh on land,”* he said. *“Turkey will always respect both Syria and Iraq's integrity and sovereignty,”* Akar underlined but warned that any terrorists hiding in those countries would be pursued with any force necessary. Located near

the Turkish border, Idlib in May 2018 was designated as a de-escalation zone where acts of aggression are expressly forbidden as part of the ongoing Astana process. Nevertheless, for the past two months, the Idlib de-escalation zone has been the target of particular fierce airstrikes by Russian and Assad regime forces. (www.dailysabah.com)

- September 2nd, Turkey is on full alert in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea with the launch of Russian military drills and U.S. destroyers equipped with “Tomahawk” missiles turning toward the region as an offensive in Syria’s last opposition-held stronghold of Idlib. The Russian Defense Ministry said that more than 25 warships and support vessels and around 30 aircrafts, including fighter jets and strategic bombers, would take part in the Mediterranean drills which it said would last from September 1st to September 8th, 2018. Upon these developments, Turkey, which previously had 10 warships in the region, dispatched several more naval vessels, the exact number of which is unknown. Turkey has numerous expressed its objections to an Idlib offensive, saying it would lead to disaster, and is taking every precaution to protect its rights and interests in international waters. (www.yenisafak.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Turkey lifted state of emergency in a move towards normalization of situation but local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. Turkish –

U.S relations have strongly been harmed forcing Ankara to approach new allies such as Russia. Turkey re-examines its relations with the EU in an effort to avoid international and regional isolation. Turkish economy is under heavy pressure and at the moment is its “Achille’s heel” bringing the state on the edge of collapse. Turkish Armed Forces have been engaged in military operations against Kurds and PKK in Northern Iraq. Turkey and U.S.A try to implement their agreement regarding Syrian Manbij in tactical level by establishing a functional model of joined army patrols. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state.

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NOTE

-  Stable situation. No security risk
-  Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored
-  Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions
-  Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk
-  Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict