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SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

“SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE” (ISSN: 2654-0304) 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, Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, 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: July 8th, the President of Albania, Ilir Meta, declared that his decree to repeal June 30th, 2019 as the Election Day has not been opposed by any political force in Albania, or even by other electoral institutions, such as the Electoral College. The President underlined once again that the decree of June 10th, 2019 is obligatory and must be implemented by everyone. The President added that according to the Electoral Code, the Electoral College does not have the competence to review the validity of any decree issued by the President. For Meta, this is a competence that is not recognized by the Constitution, the Electoral Code or any other law in power. (www.top-channel.tv)

- July 11th, the acting Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Gent Cakaj, announced that the Albanian Council of Ministers has decided to restore the building of the Albanian National Council and the Multidimensional Cultural Center at the Bujanovac Commune, Serbia. Cakaj wrote that this measure is an extension of the political efforts of the Albanian Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, for the consolidation of political efforts at the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Albanian Government. “*The support of Albania is necessary for the cultivation and advancing of the national and cultural identity of Albanians in Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvegja,*” Cakaj said in his post. (www.top-channel.tv)

- July 11th, the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) leader, Lulzim Basha, supported the decision of the Mayors coming from his party, not to leave their seats until other elections are held, not

recognizing those of June 30th, 2019. “*The Democratic Party and the opposition see the refusal made to Edi Rama’s farce not as a triumph, but as an extraordinary responsibility to turn this energy into change, for all social categories which deserve a plan to get out of the crisis, a clear plan so that Albania can belong to every Albanian, not to a small group of people who are exploiting Albania and Vlora as they have done so far,*” Basha declared. (www.top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Local elections held on June 30th, 2019 are rejected by the opposition maintaining a tense situation. Opposition leader, Lulzim Basha has called Mayors of his party to remain in their positions until new local elections to be held. Situation is further deteriorating and the time for uncontrolled domestic violence is not far. President Ilir Meta proposed presidential and local elections on October 13th, 2019 in an effort to resolve current political crisis. The country has entered in an endless crisis undermining its democratic function according to the European values and standards. Rama’s efforts to dismiss the President, Ilir Meta are ongoing. In other words, Albania is under a political and constitutional chaos. Questions for a potential civil conflict have been raised showing that situation is totally disappointing. Such situation strongly affected Albania’s EU perspective. Combination of political instability, ties between politics and organized crime, and corruption made the EU to postpone the opening of accession negotiations for Albania for the near future. According to the Enlargement

Commissioner, situation will be re-examined by October 2019. Rama's Government collapse and snap elections is a possible scenario. The Government is accused of having links with organized crime and current situation raises questions over the power of "Albanian mafia" in the country and its influence in state's politics. Undoubtedly, corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state's problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a "mother nation." The state maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. In this context, the Albanian Prime Minister and his Government work on promoting Kosovo interests in international community using any forum they have access. Albania – Kosovo agreement on unifying and coordinating their foreign policy strongly demonstrates such stance. However, Kosovo rhetoric for "a single nation" raises the question of "pan-albanism" which definitely is a threat for peace and stability in Southeastern Europe.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

July 8th, Kosovo and Albania have only made problems for themselves by not coming to the South - East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) Summit in Sarajevo and have struck a heavy blow to regional cooperation, Bosnia's Foreign Minister Igor Crnadak said adding that he has no idea what prompted Pristina not to come

to the Summit. *"I still hope we will get things back to where they were before and that Kosovo will abolish tariffs to Bosnia's products and that they will return to the talks. We did not provoke this. Pristina intended to take part in the ministerial meeting, but I do not know what happened in the meantime. What happened in the night between Saturday and Sunday and what made Behgjet Pacolli's delegation change its mind – that I do not know,"* Crnadak said, pointing out that Bosnia even issued visas at their request, but that they then received a cancellation of arrivals. During its one-year presidency over the SEEC, Bosnia organized many events aimed at further incentivizing South-East European cooperation as well as the regions further integration into the EU. Crnadak, who presided over the meeting of SEEC foreign Ministers at Mount Jahorina, near Sarajevo, which preceded the SEEC Summit, spoke of the member states' EU accession and better interconnection of the countries of the region. *"Regional interconnection was significantly damaged by Pristina's boycott of the Summit and Tirana's support for Kosovo's decision. That was completely wrong and everyone who commented on it said it was wrong and that they should have come,"* Crnadak said after the meeting which was organized in the framework of Bosnia's Presidency over the SEEC. He recalled that despite being subject to Kosovo's tariffs from November last year, Bosnia was ready to be a good host to their delegation. In November 2018, Pristina authorities introduced protective measures on all products coming from Serbia and Bosnia. Tariffs were raised from 10 to 100% in less than a month after their introduction. (www.ban1info.com)

- July 10th, Turkish authorities have informed Sarajevo about the annulment of travel documents for a number of its citizens who currently live in Bosnia and who are suspected of collaborating with terrorist groups, Security Minister Dragan Mektic told N1 on Wednesday. He called this situation “*very specific*” and “*unusual*” adding that Bosnia will first review asylum requests of those Turkish nationals before Turkey's extradition request. “*They brought us into a very specific, unusual situation. Now, the Ministry and competent agencies should launch some sort of an administrative procedure regarding that and decide on the status of those (Turkish) nationals,*” said Minister Mektic. According to him, they have applied for asylum in Bosnia. Bosnia's investigative media outlet Zurnal.info published on Monday that the Ministry of Security received a list with names of supporters of Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish Islamic scholar, the leader of so-called Gulen movement, an international organisation presently outlawed in Turkey as an alleged terrorist group. The same source claimed that President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, asked Bosnian authorities to extradite all Turkish citizens whom authorities in Turkey suspect of collaborating with the Gulen movement. According to Zurnal.info, Ankara delivered a list of eight Turkish citizens who now live in Bosnia and whose passports have been annulled. The matter was also briefly discussed this week in Erdogan's meeting with Bosnia's tripartite Presidency. Presidency Chairman Milorad Dodik told media after the meeting that Turkey does have certain demands but that this matter was not raised this time. Commenting on the status of those citizens, Minister Mektic said Bosnian authorities will first review their asylum request.

“After the decision on asylum is made, it will be followed by administrative procedure on their status. I cannot predict the outcome. We have some sort of information on the persons whose Turkish documents were annulled. Those persons contacted our institutions to see what to do next to have their status regulated. They hired a law firm here in Sarajevo to represent them,” Mektic told N1. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- July 12th, Bosnia was not criticized for the state of its media freedom at the Global Conference for Media Freedom, London 2019, Foreign Minister Igor Crnadak told N1 on Friday, but added that important issues concerning the work of public broadcasters remain to be solved as well as the bitter taste of the fact that the State still has no institution ready to protect the journalists and their freedoms. “*We will have two main propositions for our key institutions and these are: joining the Global Fund which is yet to be formed and whose aim is to support the media freedom, and the second proposition is that we join the group of countries that will form plans and reports on how to ensure media freedom,*” Crnadak said. “*I emphasized that despite threats to journalists we also have an issue concerning our public broadcasters. According to the OSCE's report, they are under immense political control. We have had concrete examples where people from the public broadcasters, supporting some candidates and parties, affected the results of the elections,*” Crnadak noted. The Foreign Minister concluded that Bosnia has many steps it needs to take in its judiciary, the rule of law and the respect of existing laws in order to ensure the protection of the freedom of the press. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political instability and uncertainty continues in Bosnia because it has not formed a Government since October 7th, 2018 general elections. The three main parties representing the three constituent entities (Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats); HDZ (Bosnian Croatian party), SDA (Bosnian Muslim or Bosniak party), and SNSD (Bosnian Serbian party) although they have reached an agreement to cooperate in forming a Government, it seems that they still cannot overcome Bosnia's accession process towards NATO. Bosnian Serbs insist that the country should remain neutral staying out of NATO, Bosniaks remain committed to NATO accession as a precondition for supporting a Government, while Bosnian Croats appears neutral on the issue wishing to overcome the deadlock (although they are in favor of joining NATO) . Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs destabilizing the state. Of course, both entities (Croats and Serbs) take in advantage "Dayton Peace Agreement" weaknesses and malfunctions. Russia pays special attention in Serbia and Bosnia in order to maintain its influence in the region. Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, and Montenegro have already entered NATO, while North Macedonia would join the Alliance within 2019. These two countries (Serbia and Bosnia) are the only "vehicles" for Russia to maintain a narrow influence in Southeastern Europe. Apart from external influence and intervention the country

has to confront several internal "threats" which undermine its sovereignty, cohesion, and viability. EU path is too far for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU. Election of ultra nationalist pro-Russian Serb Milorad Dodik in the tripartite Presidency is a strong sign of more nationalistic rhetoric and more obstacles towards Bosnia's EU and NATO (mostly) integration. Dodik is a person who does not actually believe in B&H viability and is expected to promote (actually, he has already started) his own political agenda. Bosnia faces a significant problem of illegal migration which may lead in new disputes between state's ethnicities. Government's proposal for Army units deployment in the Montenegro and Serbia borders was rejected by the ethnic Serb Dodik. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and other Muslim countries approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests.



BULGARIA: July 10th, leader of Bulgaria's Attack (Ataka) party, Volen Siderov, has been ousted as leader of the parliamentary group of the ultra-nationalist United Patriots coalition, the minority partner in the country's Government. The Speaker of the National Assembly, Tsveta Karayancheva, said that she had been informed of the change, and that the United Patriots group would be co-led by Valentin Kasabov of the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (Natzionalen Front za Spasenie na Bulgaria - NFSB) and Iskren Vesselinov of Bulgarian National Movement (Bulgarsko Natsionalno Dvizhenie - VMRO). The United Patriots' group will have

Boris Yachev and Milen Mihov as Deputy leaders and Kristian Mitev and Yulian Angelov as Secretaries. This means that Siderov's Ataka party will have no representatives in the leadership of the United Patriots group. Reports said that the vote to oust Siderov had been taken on July 9th, 2019 and that the decision had been taken at a meeting of the United Patriots group not attended by representatives of Ataka. Reporters in Parliament said that Ataka's Pavel Shopov and Dessislav Chukulov had declined to answer questions from journalists and said that a formal statement would be made later. The decision is said to have been based on Siderov not having called a meeting of the group for months. The ouster of Siderov comes after months of tensions and frequent public squabbles among the co-leaders of the United Patriots – Siderov, NFSB leader Valeri Simeonov and VMRO leader and Deputy Prime Minister Krassimir Karakachanov. The United Patriots became the minority partner in the third Boiko Borissov Government, formed in 2017 after early parliamentary elections. Such has been the infighting among the United Patriots that its three constituent parties stood separately in Bulgaria's May 2019 European Parliament elections. Only one of the three parties, Karakachanov's VMRO, got over the threshold, winning two of Bulgaria's 17 seats in the EU legislature. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- July 11th, On the basis of Council of Ministers Decision, Defense Minister Karakachanov signed an international agreements for the purchase of 8 F-16 Block 70 aircrafts and associated support International Contract including Sidewinder AIM 9X Block II Missiles, Associated Material and Services and International Loop Agreement

Multifunctional Information Sharing System - Joint Tactical Radio System (MIDS JTRS) and associated with Multifunctional Information Distribution System Joint Tactical Radio System (MIDS JTRS) (5) and related support and equipment totaling 1,256,153,980 dollars. They negotiated the delivery by the US Government to the Bulgarian Armed Forces of eight F-16 Block 70 aircrafts and related equipment and armaments. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and the order of the Law on the International Treaties of the Republic of Bulgaria, for the entry into force of these treaties, they should be ratified by the National Assembly. Considering the financial constraints of the Republic of Bulgaria, the State Department of the US has taken action to reduce the total cost by up to 60 million dollars through a request from the US Congress for additional funding to be used in the interest of the Republic of Bulgaria. (www.novinite.com)

- July 14th, North Macedonia Prime Minister Zoran Zaev announced he will take action and send a note to Bulgaria because the Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov called President of the Republic of North Macedonia Stevo Pandarovski a "*Northern Macedonian politician*." That happened just after Borisov had a partial dispute with Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic over Kosovo at a meeting of the Sarajevo Cooperation Process. "*The North Macedonian President was the first Northern Macedonian politician who said things might be the right way - Gotse Delchev is a Bulgarian who has gone to fight for the freedom of Bulgaria*," Borisov said. Days later, however, these words of his caused acute reactions from North Macedonia. Borisov's

colleague, Zoran Zaev, announced that he would send a note. The reason - according to the Prespa agreement, the state is called North Macedonia, but Macedonians live in it. According to Bulgarian National Movement (Bulgarsko Natsionalno Dvizhenie - VMRO) MEP Angel Djambazki, this behavior is an expression of our neighbors' entire policy. *"Some of the Skopje Government are trying to imitate good relations with Bulgaria and at the same time use the fraternal relations of the Bulgarian Government and society to gain recognition in NATO and the European Union,"* the MEP said. *"Look at Mr. Zaev - in Sofia he is a Bulgarian, in Brussels he is the first of all European and in Skopje denies all this,"* Djambazki stressed. Velizar Enchev, a former Ambassador to Croatia and a lecturer on Balkan problems, is firmly convinced that Bulgaria must make a tentative tune with North Macedonia. Both Djambazki and Enchev are certain that the Prime Minister has not made a mistake with his statement on the North Macedonia's President. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Junior partner of the ruling coalition, United Patriots remains the vulnerable and unpredictable piece of the inter-governmental stability; none could predict when a new incident or dispute will break out. Thus, Bulgaria has entered in a period of rather stable political situation. After European elections, opposition BSP appears weakened facing internal problems. Bulgaria faces some diplomatic problems (or misunderstandings) with neighboring countries namely Serbia and North Macedonia. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the

Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. However, the EC made clear that Bulgaria could not enter the Eurozone before 2022. Apart from that the European Parliament adopted a resolution for the accession of Bulgaria (and Romania) in Schengen Zone. However, it is questioned if the European Council will receive a unanimous final decision for Bulgaria under the current migration pressure. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. 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. The latest report on defense situation confirmed the major problems the Bulgarian Armed Forces are facing. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: July 8th, Prime

Minister Andrej Plenkovic addressed reporters on Monday evening and said that Lovro Kuscevic has offered his resignation and that he has accepted it. *"With everything that is been happening in recent weeks, we concluded that it was taking a toll on him personally, on the Government and on the HDZ. Now it is up to Minister Kuscevic to shed light on all the unanswered questions on this matter so that he can continue with his political career,"* Plenkovic told a news conference. This comes after weeks of allegations in the media that Kuscevic used his powers as a local official on the island of Brac to push through a land zoning change brought him significant profits. Kuscevic is stepping down as

both Minister and the HDZ's Political Secretary. He will be returning to Parliament as an MP. The Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ), coalition partners, the Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats Hrvatska Narodna Stranka – Liberalni Demokrati - HNS – LD), had demanded Kuscevic step down. The partners were scheduled to meet tomorrow, however, the key issue on the agenda appears to have been resolved. HNS issued a statement late Monday, saying they welcomed the decision and that they believed in “*high moral character*” when it comes to politics. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- July 9th, the ruling coalition emerged intact from a meeting of the partners on Tuesday, despite tensions between the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ) and the Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats Hrvatska Narodna Stranka – Liberalni Demokrati - HNS – LD) over Minister Kuscevic, who stepped down on Monday evening. Kuscevic told reporters he did not want to be a burden to the Government and his party, but insisted he did nothing wrong. “*We had a meeting where all of the partners presented their view of the current situation. There were some differences, but we all agree that we should finish our term,*” said Gordan Jandrokovic of the HDZ following the meeting. HNS will remain in the Government and HNS leader Ivan Vrdoljak said he was pleased with the outcome of the meeting. Darinko Kosor of the Croatian Social Liberal Party (Hrvatska Socijalno-Liberalna Stranka - HSLS) does not agree and would have preferred to see the HNS go together with Kuscevic. Speaking prior to the meeting, Milorad Batinic of

the HNS said that his party had been more than fair as a coalition partner to the Croatian Democratic Union, despite the ultimatum it gave to the HDZ regarding Kuscevic. He said Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic's decision to let Kuscevic go was “*correct and statesmanlike.*” Batinic dismissed allegations that the HNS had acted unfairly by communicating its demands regarding Kuscevic publicly rather than privately with the HDZ's leadership. Because the HNS had mentioned possible criminal responsibility on the part of the Minister, Batinic said that they expected the relevant institutions to do their job. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- July 11th, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic told reporters tonight who he has chosen to replace Administration Minister Lovro Kuscevic, who resigned earlier this week. “*I have decided to name Ivan Malenica, the dean of Sibenik Polytechnic. He is young, an excellent choice, and a breath of fresh air,*” Plenkovic said. The Prime Minister briefed coalition partners on the choice late Thursday, but lawmakers are not expected to vote in the new minister on Friday. “*Over the coming days, we will be holding consultations with respect to some other positions in the cabinet. We will hold a vote of confidence in the new Minister and the others when we determine that the time is right and forward the proposal to lawmakers,*” Plenkovic said. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country enjoys political stability and support from EU towards its Eurozone goal. Low political crisis with Minister Kuscevic was resolved by the Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic before becomes

a major problem in the Parliament. Croatia's letter of intent to enter the European Exchange Rate Mechanism II, the Eurozone's front door, was accepted by the Eurogroup; the first step for the Eurozone goal. Croatia follows a tough regional policy with neighboring countries. It is openly intervene in Bosnia's internal affairs, while it maintains open disputes with Slovenia, Serbia, and Bosnia. One should take into consideration that Croatia shows its military strength and capabilities quite often not only in international, but also in national level sending strong messages to neighboring countries. Apart from that, Croatia pays special attention in energy strategy and security announcing ambitious projects. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone. It implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.



CYPRUS: July 10th, the UN Secretary General's special envoy Jane Holl Lute is set to visit Cyprus in the next three weeks, President Nicos Anastasiades said on social media on Wednesday night. *"It was agreed that in the upcoming weeks, in about three weeks, she will visit Cyprus to continue attempts [to restart talks],"* he said on social media. He said that they spoke over the phone and that they discussed the next steps in dealing with the Cyprus issue. Anastasiades reiterated that he is ready restart negotiations. The President added that Lute informed him of UN Secretary General Antonio

Guterres' interest to have talks restart. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- July 14th, Foreign Minister, Nikos Christodoulides, will brief his EU counterparts on July 15th, 2019 in Brussels, during the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), on the state of play and the recent developments in relation to Turkey's illegal actions in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). According to a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Sunday, Christodoulides will also be having his first meeting with the new Foreign Minister of Greece, Nikos Dendias, on the sidelines of the FAC meeting. According to the press release, Christodoulides who is flying to Brussels on Sunday afternoon to attend the FAC meeting, will exchange views with Dendias on the recent developments regarding the illegal activities of Turkey in the Republic of Cyprus EEZ, as well as about the efforts for the resumption of negotiations on the Cyprus problem, as long as Turkey's illegal actions are terminated. FAC is expected to adopt on Monday a text drafted by the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the 28 EU member states (COREPER) regarding the measures against Turkey, due to the continuing and escalating illegal activities within the Republic of Cyprus' territorial waters and its EEZ. Turkey issued in May a navigational telex, announcing its intention to start drilling off Cyprus until September 3rd, 2019. Since May 4th, 2019 the Turkish drill ship "*Fatih*" is anchored in an area that falls within the EEZ and continental shelf of the Republic of Cyprus. A second Turkish drill ship, "*Yavuz*", arrived off the island's northeastern coast on Monday. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- July 14th, Turkey will continue drilling for gas in waters off Cyprus if the internationally recognized Greek Cypriot Government does not accept a cooperation proposal put forward by Turkish Cypriots, Ankara's Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu said. Cavusoglu said a proposal by Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci that both parties on the divided island cooperate in exploration and exploitation of gas could contribute to stability and peace in the eastern Mediterranean. In an article for the Cyprus Post, Cavusoglu said that until Greek Cypriots adopt the proposals set out by Akinci on Saturday to work with Turkish Cypriots, Turkey would continue operations in areas where Turkish Cypriot authorities have licensed it to work "with determination and without change." The proposal submitted to the UN by Mustafa Akinci on Saturday is a formalized attempt to move forward with a proposal he has made in the past for the setting up of a joint committee for cooperation on hydrocarbons. It said Akinci wanted to change the hydrocarbons' issue from one of tension and conflict to cooperation. The proposal involves the establishment of a joint committee under the supervision of the UN which would have the same number of members from both sides, and an independent observer. His proposal is also said to outline the structure, targets and methodology of the committee and includes the establishment of a fund and details on how this fund would be used. Akinci also sent the proposal to the UN Secretary - General Antonio Guterres, the EU Commission and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini. Akinci's proposal is likely to be welcomed by Guterres as the issue is part of what is stalling the peace process from moving

forward. In his latest report during the week, Guterres struck at a note of concern but kept his language neutral. "I have repeatedly stressed that the natural resources found in and around Cyprus should benefit both communities and constitute a strong incentive for all parties to find a mutually acceptable and durable solution to the Cyprus problem," he said. Turkey's Fatih ship started drilling off western Cyprus in May. A second drilling ship, Yavuz, arrived off the northeastern coast last week. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus has reached a deadlock in the ongoing crisis with Turkish invasion of drillship Fatih (while the second one Yavuz is also ready to start drills) within its EEZ. Fatih is there almost four months, while Turkish administration declares that offshore drilling will continue until an agreement between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities will be reached regarding exploration and exploitation of gas. In other words, Turkey's objective goal is to force (by the presence and activity of drill ships) Cyprus to compromise reaching an agreement with the occupied north part. It should be noted that leader of the Turkish Cypriot community Mustafa Akinci officially submitted his proposal for co-management of hydrocarbons to the Cypriot administration, and the UN. The UN Secretary General has a positive stance towards Acinci's proposal and developments regarding the Cypriot question are not excluded in the near future. Despite international calls to Turkey for abandoning its plans of violating the Cypriot EEZ and its sovereign rights, Turkish actions remain "unanswered." Announcement of Cypriot

administration that arrest warrants have been issued against workers in the drillship are interpreted as spasmodic actions of a trapped state which cannot act decisively and effectively for protecting its sovereignty. Actually, Cyprus is trapped because it does not have a mechanism of power (military, diplomatic, economic etc) to force Turkey to withdraw its ships. Cyprus lacks of naval and air forces which could deter Turkey of violating Cypriot sovereign rights, while Greece appears reluctant in sending naval units in the region showing presence and exercising deterrence. The EU prepared a draft with sanctions against Turkey but it under question which will be its final form. Turkish message is very clear; we are present in Cyprus, we are present in the energy “game” and nothing works leaving Turkey aside. In other words, energy security includes Turkey; otherwise eastern Mediterranean is not a stable and secure sea. A “hot” incident cannot be excluded. Despite current situation, Cyprus works systematically in order to become a major part of the East Mediterranean energy hub. It is favored not only by its natural gas deposits, but also by its strategic position in the “heart” of East Mediterranean Sea and of course of being an EU member state. The strategy of multilateral cooperation seems to be fruitful. Cyprus seeks to negotiate and reach agreements with its neighboring countries regarding their EEZ expanding maritime cooperation and energy security. Turkey looks like being isolated from the energy game and its current aggressive reaction is attributed to this situation. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Cyprus improved its bilateral relations with the

US, strengthened its defense cooperation with France, UK, and lately develops its defense and security relations with Germany. One could say that Cyprus strengthens defense cooperation with NATO leading countries. The US senate voted on the abolishment of the arms embargo in Cyprus but the term of forbidding Russians vessels from using Cypriot ports may create more problems than it would solve. 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 and sovereignty.



GREECE: July 9th, Greece's conservative New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) party won Sunday's snap parliamentary election, defeating the ruling Coalition of Radical left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) party of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras.



Inauguration of the new Government
(Photo source: www.presidency.gr)

The following are official results released by the Interior Ministry with 100% of the votes counted and the projected seats in the 300-seat Parliament; ND 39.85% (158 seats), SYRIZA 31.53% (86

seats), Movement for Change (Κίνημα Αλλαγής - KINAL) 8.10% (22 seats), Greek Communist Party (Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας - KKE) 5.30% (15 seats), Greek Solution (Ελληνική Λύση) 3.70% (10 seats), Mera25 (MEPA25) 3.44% (9 seats), Other parties 8.08% (no seats). Greece's new Cabinet was sworn in Tuesday, two days after conservative party leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis won early elections on pledges to make the country more business-friendly, cut taxes and negotiate an easing of draconian budget conditions agreed as part of the country's rescue program. The new Cabinet relies heavily on experienced politicians who have served in previous governments, but also includes non-politician technocrats considered experts in their fields. Mitsotakis appointed Christos Staikouras to the crucial post of Finance Minister. Staikouras is an economist and engineer who had served as Deputy Minister in a previous Government. The new Foreign Minister is Nikos Dendias, who held previous Cabinet positions in the Ministries of Development, Defense and Public Order. A former Public Order Minister under a previous socialist Government, Michalis Chrisohoidis, took the reins of the Ministry once again as one of Mitsotakis' non-parliamentary appointees. (www.ekathimerini.com, www.ekloges.ypes.gr)

- July 9th, in its first statement after the official change of guard on Tuesday, Greece's Foreign Ministry condemned Turkey's planned drilling inside Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), saying such an action violates international law and further escalates tensions in the region. "We condemn Turkey's attempted illegal drilling within the territorial waters of the Republic of

Cyprus," the Ministry said. "We express our full solidarity with the Republic of Cyprus and we call once again on Turkey to immediately cease its illegal activities and to respect the sovereignty and sovereign rights of Cyprus," the announcement stressed. The Ministry said this activity against the sovereign rights of an EU member-state is incompatible with a country that wants to join the EU and reaffirms the validity of the European Council's decision to adopt appropriate measures against Ankara. (www.mfa.gr, www.ekathimerini.com)

- July 12th, in a statement, the Greek Foreign Ministry said the Government recognized Juan Guaido as President of Venezuela "in order for him to call for free, fair and democratic presidential elections." "The Government of the Hellenic Republic, in accordance with the common EU position in the statement of the EU High Representative/Vice President, Mrs Mogherini, on behalf of the EU 28, decided to recognize the President of the democratically elected National Assembly, Juan Guaido as President of Venezuela, in order for him to call for free, fair and democratic presidential elections," a Ministry statement said. "The Government of the Hellenic Republic strongly supports the efforts of the EU, especially through the International Contact Group and the Special Representative of the EUHR/VP, Mr Enrique Iglesias, as well as related initiatives such as the Oslo talks, with the aim to secure a peaceful, political, democratic, negotiated solution to the crisis, for the benefit of the Venezuelan people," the statement concluded. (www.mfa.gr, www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The new conservative Government was sworn in signaling a new internal and external policy for the country. In foreign policy this was made absolutely clear from the very first moment; The Government recognized Juan Guaido as the President of Venezuela in full accordance with the EU stance. Speaking about domestic policy, the Government focuses on security, a very sensitive issue for Greek society which faces serious problems with domestic terrorism (with leftist origins) and a strong active anarchist movement which destabilizes mainly the capital Athens with violent attacks on public and private services. The new majority Government ensures political stability in a “strange” time period that security, diplomatic, and economic issues challenge Greek administration. Greek – Turkish relations are in a critical point due to Turkey’s decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills. Moreover, Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial and maritime sovereign rights. A crisis to Cyprus means a crisis to Greece forcing Armed Forces to deploy military, naval, and air units. Taking into consideration that Cyprus lacks of naval and air power it is Greece which will support the small and vulnerable island located in the East Mediterranean heart. Turkish fighter jets keep on violating Greek airspace. It is a fact that Greek political and military leadership is concerned over a potential incident with Turkey, especially if its drill ships appear within Greek waters. Strengthening of military cooperation between Greece and the US upgrades Greece’s strategic role in Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East as a western (US, EU, NATO) forward military base. On the other hand, Greece is concerned that this upgraded

relation with the US may reinforce Turkish aggression in the Aegean Sea. Furthermore, Greece seeks to modernize its Armed Forces by receiving US military aid. It is a fact that Greek military force has been affected by the long economic crisis threatening the balance of power with Turkey. Security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ (not likely within the summer touristic period).



KOSOVO: July 9th, Ramush Haradinaj, Kosovo’s Prime Minister said that Pristina and Podgorica “interstate Commissions will meet soon, to once more look into a part of the demarcation line with Montenegro,” the RTK TV reported as cited by the FoNet news agency. He added he discussed the issue with his Montenegro’s counterpart Dusko Markovic and that talks “about many cases were held in full confidence.” “Kosovo and Montenegro are ready to form the Commissions for considering demarcation line in the direction of (bordering points) Kula and Cakor. We confirmed readiness with Montenegro’s Prime Minister to start working on the issue and to soon open Kula and Cakor crossings,” Haradinaj said. Parliaments in Pristina and Podgorica approved the agreement on demarcation in May and the two Prime Ministers concurred that there could be open issues during the marking of the border, but that it is important they will be approached appropriately and with honesty. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- July 11th, two Serbian citizens were arrested at a border crossing between Kosovo and Serbia on suspicion of espionage, but Belgrade officials

insisted they were unjustly detained. The Prosecutor's Office in the Kosovo town of Gnjilane told Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) on Thursday that the two Serbs were detained at the Dheu i Bardhe border crossing for allegedly trying to smuggle files out of Kosovo. *"On this specific case, the Gjilan/Gnjilane Prosecution's Department for Serious Crimes, yesterday on July 10th, 2019 detained two people of Serb nationality on the suspicion that they have committed the criminal offence of espionage,"* said Liridona Xheladini from the Gjilan/Gnjilane Prosecution. Xheladini alleged that the two arrested Serbs were sent by the Serbian Interior Ministry to retrieve files on Kosovo Serb officials in the Klllokot and Vitia municipalities and take them to Serbia. While searching their car, Kosovo Police allegedly found the files and detained the suspects. The Serbian Government's office for Kosovo condemned the arrests, describing them as a *"flagrant example of legal violence."* It said that the two people arrested were a primary school principal from Vitina and a technical school principal from Vrbovac. It claimed this was proof that *"a campaign of intimidation of Serb people in Kosovo and Metohija by arresting Serbs and holders of important public positions continues."* (www.balkaninsight.com)

- July 13th, Serbian and Kosovo Presidents Aleksandar Vucic and Hashim Thaci reached an agreement which Germany rejected and French President Emmanuel Macron is now in a scouting mission to determine the possibility of renewing the Serbia - Kosovo normalization dialogue, the long-time Balkans expert James Hooper told Voice of America. *"Something incredible*

happened – the Serb and Kosovo leaders have achieved a concept regarding demarcation, which would include a relatively small exchange of territory – and that was unacceptable to the Europeans," Hooper said. He said he finds it unbelievable that the agreement was rejected without offering an alternative solution. *"Then the German Chancellor told Macron to see if there is a way to replace the rejected agreement with some sort of a process which would lead to a new agreement,"* he noted. The American expert added that Germany had de facto coordinated situation with Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj who *"blocked the agreement in Kosovo playing the nationalist card"* while *"Chancellor Merkel blocked the agreement in the EU, at the recent Western Balkan Summit in Berlin."* *"She held a pretty grueling meeting with Aleksandar Vucic and I think that was the end of that agreement which Thaci and Vucic invested so much effort in. I am convinced that the agreement, which would significantly speed up Serbia's path to EU, was reached, just as I am convinced that Kosovo would get the UN's recognition,"* Hooper concluded. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo keeps escalating tension with Serbia blocking any chance of dialogue restart. Arrest of two Kosovo Serb teachers accused of espionage and ban of Serbian Minister Aleksandar Vulin to visit North Mitrovica populated mostly by Serbs are the last two provocative incidents from Kosovo administration against Serbia added to the Police operation in the north arresting Serbs (and Albanians), 100% tax on Serbian and

Bosnian products, Kosovo Assembly resolution that Serbs committed genocide during 1998-1999 war, establishment of Kosovo Army, request for a special Court for Serbs undermining any possibility of negotiations with Serbia. As long as the EU (namely Germany) and US “spoil” Kosovo allowing it to act beyond accepted rules and international laws and agreements there is no chance of a peaceful mutual accepted resolution of the Kosovo case. There is a sense that the EU does not actually seek progress in the dialogue process between Serbia and Kosovo. Pristina does not hesitate to escalate tension even with an armed conflict. Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci stated that his state could be unified with Albania including parts of south Serbia (Presevo, Bujanovac and Medveja). Such statements are not only immature, but also put under risk peace and stability in the region. Thaci openly speaks for border change and more specific violent change. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. 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. Kosovo seeks its Army to be operating all over the country pushing NATO towards such direction. The presence of Kosovo Army in the north it is assessed of high security risk which may lead in armed violence.



MOLDOVA: July 9th, Foreign Affairs and European Integration Minister Nicu Popescu and Assistant Administrator for USAID's

Bureau for Europe and Eurasia Brock Bierman have discussed the re-launch of the comprehensive assistance provided by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in key sectors of cooperation, as well as identification of new spheres of common interest, the Foreign Affairs and European Integration Ministry's (MAEIE) press service has reported. The two officials assessed the priority fields concerned by the support offered by USAID and ascertained the beneficial effects of the Agency's assistance, among which also the strengthening of the business environment in Moldova. Popescu pointed out the importance of the support provided by USAID to Moldova, especially for the attraction of foreign investors into the country, as well as for the carrying out of other important projects from diverse developing sectors. For his part, Bierman highlighted the common desideratum for the consolidation of Moldova's prosperous development. He appreciated the Moldovan Government's commitment to strengthen the partnership with the US in key sectors, such as energy diversification, economic and financial development. On July 8th, 2019 Prime Minister Maia Sandu and Bierman signed two letters of confirming the intention to increase by 29 million dollars the financing for the democratic governance and economic growth in Moldova. The contribution is meant to facilitate the economic growth and will promote the export-oriented economy, enhancement of competitiveness, creation of jobs and diversification of energy sources. Since 1992, the US has provided Moldova with assistance worth more than 1.4 billion dollars. (www.moldpres.md)

- July 11th, Moldova perceives the strategic partnership with Ukraine as a significant pillar of national security, and the European integration and implementation of the Association Agreement are the goals it shares with the neighbouring state. The statement has been made in Kiev by Prime Minister, Maia Sandu, after a meeting with President of Ukraine, Volodimir Zelenski. Sandu has said that today she discussed with Zelenski about regional security and European integration as a common goal of Moldova and Ukraine, bilateral agenda of both states and efforts to build functional institutions for citizens. Sandu has added that she strongly supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine and assured that Moldova would become a reliable partner and neighbor. Premier has also announced that authorities in Chisinau are opting to improve bilateral relations with Ukraine. *“We want closer cooperation with Ukraine in economic and energy sectors. We shall try to establish common border control, constant and 100% functional, to put an end to crime and illegal trafficking. We need a strong partnership to improve the ecological situation of the Dniester river. I am convinced that we can find favorable solutions for our citizens and common European agenda,”* said Sandu. At his turn, Zelenski said that the authorities in Chisinau and Kiev have similar positions upon sovereignty and security of both states. According to Zelenski, Ukraine will continue to support the territorial integrity of Moldova and it will actively participate in negotiations on settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. The Head of the neighboring state has added that Moldova and Ukraine are close not only on map. (www.moldpres.md)

- July 12th, the resumption of negotiations and meetings in format 5+2 is part of priorities set by the President Igor Dodon at a meeting with representatives of mediators and observers from Russia, Ukraine, USA, and EU. According to Dodon, during the meeting, there were discussed current situation of Transnistrian settlement, confidence building measures between the two banks of the Dniester river, and premises for a possible resumption in 2020 of the political negotiations on settlement of the Transnistrian issue. The senior officials supported the joint efforts of Moldovan leadership to promote the regulatory process including by further implementing the confidence building measures outlined in the Protocol of Berlin, in 2016. The Head of state said that he presented to the mediators the three priorities for Transnistrian settlement for upcoming period; human rights and democratization of Transnistrian region, ensuring free movement of people, goods and services throughout Moldova, restoring a single trade – economic area, and creating premises for resumption of negotiations in 2020. The recent session of 5+2 group took place in Rome in May 2018. (www.moldpres.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Newly elected Government has started to demonstrate its commitment in pro-western orientation of the country. Prime Minister Maia Sandu is rapidly promoting her agenda; strengthening of relations with Ukraine, implementation of Association Agreement with the EU, and closer cooperation with the US. As a reward the US is ready to re-launched its economic assistance (increased by 29 million

dollars), while IMF announced a new financial installment for Moldova. Of course Russia will not remain just a passive observer in Moldova's approach to the West; especially when Moldova is considered as a pivotal country for Russian national security. State institutions' changes move rapidly by the Government in an effort of re-democratization of the country. The country was close to turbulence and political chaos but stability has been restored when former ruling PDM withdrew smoothly from power. It is expected that the EU tough policy against Moldova will also soften as a signal of support to the new Government which includes a pro-western agenda. Such support could be expressed by restarting micro-economic assistance. The ongoing crisis between Russia and Ukraine may affect Moldova; First of all Russia maintains military forces in Transnistrian ground and secondly it shares common borders with Ukraine which cannot be unnoticed by international stakeholders. The "Transnistria case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: July 12th, the Government of Albania has decided to provide 25,000 euro in financial support to Montenegro's Albanian National Council, which represents the interests of the ethnic Albanian minority in the country. Faik Nika, the President of the Albanian National Council, said that the Albanian Government will give financial support for first time to assist the running of his organization and its office in the municipality of Plav. Nika told Montenegrin media the Albanian Government has recently made three very important decisions for

the Albanian community in Montenegro. "They made the decision to abolish work permits for Albanians from Montenegro working in Albania. There is also the decision to open an Albanian consulate in the [Albanian-majority] municipality of Ulcinj and the decision to financially support the National Council of Albanians in Montenegro," he said. "This is the result of intensive cooperation between the Albanian National Council, the Albanian Embassy in Podgorica and the Government of Albania," he added. The Albanian National Council was established in 2008 and, like other national councils representing the interests of minorities in the country, is financed from the Montenegrin state budget. A report by the Montenegrin Government's Ministry for Human and Minority rights in 2018 said the state gave 600,000 euros in financial support to the country's three national councils (Albanian, Bosniak, and Serbian). Under Montenegrin law, the national councils are independent bodies, mostly funded by the state to promote the cultural heritage of the Albanian, Bosniak and Serbian ethnic communities. Albanian Foreign Minister Gent Cakaj said that the National Council plays a substantial role in the representation and empowerment of Albanians in Montenegro. The Albanian Government scrapped work permits for Albanians from Montenegro and North Macedonia in May, so they have the same rights to work in the country as Albanians from Kosovo and Serbia's Presevo Valley. Cakaj said at the time that it was part of a wider package of measures that Albania has planned to bring ethnic Albanians in the region closer together. Ethnic Albanians make up about 5% of the population of Montenegro, and they form the majority in the Tuzi area and much of

south-western Montenegro.
(www.balkaninsight.com)

- July 13th, although the Democratic Party of Socialists (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) announced that the Parliamentary Committee will present proposals for the reform of electoral law at the end of the month, nothing will happen until the end of September. Head of the EU delegation in Montenegro, Aivo Orav has repeatedly stressed the need to restore confidence in the electoral process, to change the electoral law and the fact that parliamentary elections are due next year. EU Commission's Progress Report on Montenegro also states that the Electoral Legislation Committee is *“expected to fulfill its ambitious mandate. The active and constructive involvement of all parties is needed in order to strengthen parliamentary accountability, oversight of the executive and democratic control, and to bring about better laws,”* the report says. Prime Minister and Deputy Leader of DPS, Dusko Markovic invited opposition to join Committee's work showing a greater degree of consensus. DPS announced two days ago that despite the boycott, work in the working groups of the Electoral Legislation Committee is conducted *“continuously and efficiently.”* *“By the end of July, we will have ready electoral law draft seeking to make opposition to return to the Committee and to continue dialogue on electoral and other legislation,”* DPS said. However, Democratic Front (Demokratski Front – DF) member of the Committee Branka Bosnjak said that if DPS seeks dialogue and fair and free elections, it should offer an agreement on a fundamental change of electoral law including a technical Government that would guarantee

implementation of agreed reforms.
(www.vijesti.me)

- July 14th, Montenegro's Defense Minister, Predrag Boskovic, met today with the Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Defense, Major General (ret.) Udi Adam in Tel Aviv, and used the opportunity to stress that cooperation between the two countries has reached quite satisfactory level. *“Mr Boskovic emphasized that cooperation between Montenegro and Israel is at extremely satisfactory level, adding that Montenegro being a NATO member state, strives to bolster bilateral cooperation in the area of defense with both Allies and its partners,”* the Montenegrin Ministry of Defense issued a statement. Boskovic also informed his Israeli counterpart on the plans of the Ministry referring to the modernization and equipment for the Army of Montenegro, while Adam congratulated him on achieved success in the Euro-Atlantic integrations, expressing his confidence that bilateral cooperation between the two states would continue to develop in a dynamic way. The Israeli Minister stressed Israel will remain committed to providing support to Montenegro in strengthening its national defense capacities. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although EC Progress Report is assessed as a positive one, it raises specific concerns over media freedom, corruption and organized crime. Report is elaborating on specific cases signaling detailed research. Montenegro enters in a crucial crossroad regarding its EU future and specific reforms and actions should be implemented if it remains committed in its goal to access the EU by

2025. Political stability is re-establishing again after opposition decision to return in parliamentary Committees. Protests against the President and high officials disturbed a period of “euphoria”, emerging state’s problems such as corruption, link between state’s politics and organized crime, money laundering, media freedom, and nepotism. However, protesters movement has lost dynamics and ruling DPS is more stable. Nevertheless, opposition insists on demanding establishment of a technical Government and early parliamentary elections. The EU and US strongly supports the President Djukanovic and the Montenegrin Government despite corruption accusations as being the only loyal partner committed to the Western orientation of the state. In other words the west is closing its eyes in lack of democratic values and rule of law due to geopolitical interests namely Russian influence. The Government promotes state’s political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment; However, the state needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Montenegro shows activity within NATO trying to prove that it is an equal partner of the alliance with military capacity according to NATO standards. Moreover, it tries to modernize and strengthen its operational capabilities and in this context it raised its defense budget aiming at purchasing new assets such as armored vehicles.



NORTH MACEDONIA: July 10th, asked to comment on the published phone conversations involving Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and the Russian pranksters, Defense Minister Radmila Shekerinska said we would have to get used to being a target of different hybrid, cyber and other attacks aimed at threatening North Macedonia’s bid to join NATO. Such hybrid warfare and threats are not new, and we would need to be quick to respond to them, Shekerinska pointed out during her visit to the pilot training center in the Petrovec army barracks on Wednesday. Rules of fair play do not apply here, she said noting that the same instrument had also been used with NATO Secretary General, the French President and many other high officials in international politics. “*These attacks and threats will continue. Our country’s security has not been destabilized in this particular attack, so our strategic priorities have not been threatened. However, we need to completely rebuild our security culture,*” said Shekerinska. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- July 11th, German Ambassador to Serbia Thomas Schieb hopes that the date for the start of North Macedonia’s EU accession negotiations will be known very soon. “*Because of intensive harmonization, in Germany among others, the decision for the start of the negotiations has been delayed until October. Germany welcomes the great statesmanship achievement of North Macedonia and Greece, managing to solve the name issue after such a long time, and therefore we hope that the country will launch negotiations very soon,*” Schieb said. According to him, Berlin believes that the

accession of new members and reforms within the EU are two separate processes that have to develop in parallel. Regarding the Srebrenica massacre anniversary, Schieb said the stance of Germany and the other EU members is that genocide took place in Srebrenica in 1995, adding his expectation that Serbia would also adopt that position. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- July 11th, North Macedonia's Prime Minister Zoran Zaev said on Thursday that he had met with Russian Ambassador to Skopje Sergey Bazdnikin and the two men agreed that the case with the Russian pranksters would not affect bilateral relations and cooperation. *"Friendship with Russia certainly continues. It is our duty to strengthen and enhance it. We are working on new economic projects. I believe trade with the Russian Federation will also grow,"* Zaev said. *"Modern technologies can sometimes cause unpleasant situations like this, but countries must promote friendship,"* he added in answer to a reporter's question at the opening of ATS GROUP plant in Vizbegovo. Asked if Russian authorities would do something about the case, Zaev said that neither North Macedonia nor Russia has legal provisions that could apply to such cases. *"What we definitely need to do is strengthen security protocols,"* he said. (www.nezavisen.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

VMRO-DPMNE hardens its rhetoric demanding early elections, while the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev tried to change political climate by reshuffling the Government. Following the European "cold shower" citizens have started to

focus on Government's failures in fight against corruption and organized crime, social care measures, and foreign policy. In other words, domestic politics are not in favor of ruling SDSM and Zoran Zaev. He based his political survival and dominance in the triptych "resolution of name issue with Greece – NATO accession – opening of EU accession talks." Although the first one was successfully accomplished and the second is proceeding rapidly the third one has stuck. Consequently, VMRO-DPMNE increased its pressure for a caretaker Government and snap elections. The threats of nationalism and political instability are covering North Macedonia's sky. The country should focus on its economy and major administrative and judicial reforms, fight against corruption and impunity aiming at reaching the EU standards.



ROMANIA: July 10th,

President Klaus Iohannis met the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) leaders for talks on presidential election. PNL Chairman Ludovic Orban announced at the end of the meeting that the Head of the state has urged the liberals to be determined, mobilized and serious in the campaign for presidential elections. Other topics discussed included the GRECO report and the review of the Constitution, ziare.com reports. *"We talked about internal and European politics, and we have also initiated talks about the presidential campaign, in the sense that PNL supports Iohannis' candidacy. As far as domestic policy is concerned, we have discussed in connection with the draft to review the Constitution, which was submitted in the framework of the partnership for the*

consolidation of the European path. We also had discussions on the evolution regarding the electoral laws, the voting rights in Diaspora. We discussed the GRECO report and internal policy issues,” Orban said at the end of the meeting with Iohannis. Orban said PNL will support Laura Codruta Kovesi for the position of European Chief Prosecutor. The meeting took place in the context in which the Government has set the date of the first round of the presidential elections on November 10th, 2019. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- July 11th, Romania made a statement that makes it harder to improve bilateral relations, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Peter Szijjarto said on Wednesday for Hungarian MTI press agency, in response to Wednesday’s press release from the Romanian Foreign Ministry. *“In a state which observes the rule of law and respects European values, those punished are not the ones who demonstrate peacefully at a cemetery, but those who attack them,”* Szijjarto said. The Head of the Hungarian diplomacy also said that it is up to the Parliament and the Government of Romania to do everything possible and to create an appropriate legal framework for minorities to exercise their rights so that the members of an ethnic community are not fined, discriminatory, by *“exorbitant amounts,”* only for the use of their own symbols, MTI informs. Romanian Foreign Ministry said in a release on Wednesday that *“Foreign Minister Teodor Melescanu’s meeting with his Hungarian counterpart, Peter Szijjarto, took place at the express request of the Romanian side, given that the Hungarian side has maintained a non-constructive attitude, and for discouraging the constant provocations from the Hungarian side.*

During the meeting, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto called for the judgments of the judiciary to be ignored and the Romanian state to intervene in justice.” According to the same source, Melescanu reminded his Hungarian counterpart that *“in a democratic and functioning state respecting the European values and the principle of the state’s separate powers, Government intervention in Justice is not acceptable.”* Also, the Romanian Minister has urged Hungarian officials to avoid any provocations against Romania in the future. Romania Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed on Tuesday that the two officials met on the margins of the informal meeting of OSCE countries’ Foreign Ministers in Strbske Pleso, Slovakia. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- July 11th, Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dancila, who is also the Head of the ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), said in an interview with local DC News, that she will run for President if the party asks her. *“I have not yet taken this into account, but if the party asks me and this is the only solution, I will accept it,”* Dancila said, according to local Digi24. PSD is yet to announce its candidate for this year’s presidential elections. There are several party members who would seek to join the race for the presidential seat, among them Finance Minister Eugen Teodorovici, MPs Serban Nicolae and Liviu Plesoianu, and former Defense Minister Mihai Fifor. According to the local media, PSD also considers having a joint candidate with its junior ruling coalition partner Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE) and this could be ALDE President Calin Popescu Tariceanu. PSD has a

difficult mission in this year's presidential elections after its defeat in the European Parliament's elections in May and the incarceration of its former leader Liviu Dragnea, who was sentenced to three and a half years in prison for corruption. Current President Klaus Iohannis, who announced that he would run for another term, has the biggest chances to win the presidential elections scheduled for November 2019. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

It seems Dragnea's imprisonment and change of ruling PSD leadership brought back political normality and stability in Romanian politics. Presidential election scheduled for November 2019 (November 10th, 2019 the first round and November 24th, 2019 the second one) is the new challenge for domestic politics. Ruling coalition (PSD – ALDE) looks for a strong candidacy against current President Klaus Iohannis. Defeat of PSD in recent European elections makes things more complicated for Socialists. Under these circumstances, Prime Minister Viorica Dancila stated that she may run for President “if it is asked by the party.” The EU Justice Commissioner said recently that triggering of article 7 of the EU Treaty against Romania it is not an option at the moment strengthening the idea that something has changed in Romanian politics. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning has become an advanced base close to Russia. Its strategic importance and role has been upgraded and high level NATO exercises take place in its territory. Consequently, Russia reacts mainly against the NATO military base in Deveselu where anti-missile defense

systems have been deployed. Temporarily deployment of THAAD system, a modern high-capability system, may raise tension in the region. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces; in this context it was announced that 5 more F-16 fighter jets will be purchased added to the existing 12 (operational request for a total of 36 fighter jets).



SERBIA: July 8th, Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic claimed that he will “step down” prior to opposition comes to a chance to get closer, underlying that something like this is hard to happen in a decade. What finally counts is that Serbia experiences economic growth is an independent, military neutral and sovereign country promoting its national interest, Vucic said. “Serbia is heading forward and it would be important for the investment plan to succeed, so that we could keep young people within the country fighting for them and their future within the country,” Vucic stated, adding that he is quite lucky to have “such experts” for political opponents. He also reiterated that someone else would take over Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka - SNS) next year, as he is not going to run for leadership role on the party assembly. “There is no doubt that someone else would take over SNS leadership next year,” Vucic said. When he was asked how this change would benefit SNS, Vucic said that SNS is undoubtedly the best and the strongest political party and that he will assist SNS in winning next parliamentary elections. (www.b92.net)

- July 9th, Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic stated for Italian daily “la Repubblica” that “Kosovo presents a focal point of instability in the Balkan

region.” Dacic claimed that Belgrade “put up great efforts into the dialogue while Pristina constantly undermines it,” pointing out that “Pristina’s authorities do not want compromise.” When asked how dangerous is the current situation pertaining to the decision of banning all Serb’s officials from entering Kosovo, even in the places with Serbian minority, that afterwards Kosovo’s Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj proclaimed as fake news, Dacic stated that this is “a senseless decision that annuls all the efforts for dialogue resumption that would lead to reaching political agreement.” Dacic said that Pristina’s move on establishing Kosovo Armed Forces breached all international agreements, but this was “only a small part of their destructive activities.” “What about 100% import tariffs imposed on Serbian and Bosnian goods? This is trade ban, eradicated in civilized world for centuries. International community had condemned this measure, demanding its abolishing, but the taxes remain in force for the last seven months. Prishtina had not fulfilled any obligation within the dialogue under EU auspices, among others, the establishment of the Community of Serbian municipalities on Kosovo and Metohija... We are afraid that their next move might be exerting violence on the Serbs on Kosovo and Metohija and on their properties,” Dacic claimed. The journalist expressed concern as to how dangerous such tensions might be for the fragile peace on the Balkans and in Europe, and Dacic responded that “Kosovo presents focal point of instability in the Balkan region.” (www.b92.net)

- July 12th, Dragan Djilas, Head of the Party of Freedom and Justice (Stranka Slobode i Pravde -

SSP), told N1 morning show he did not expect the authorities to meet the opposition’s demands and create equal conditions for elections adding that opposition should immediately announce it would boycott the vote. He said that parties which would take part in the ballot under the current setting could not be called opposition. “The opposition within the Alliance for Serbia (SzS) has a common stand that under such conditions it is impossible to take part in the elections... I said we should now state that we would boycott them,” Djilas said. “We decided to wait until September’s deadline [opposition gave authorities to meet their requests], but even if something changes, you cannot reverse the whole story in six months [elections are due next spring],” Djilas said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country has entered in a period of fragile political stability due to citizens’ reactions against governmental practices regarding human rights, media freedom, and elections transparency. Although protesters insist on organizing protests, it seems that opposition reactions lose momentum. President Alexandar Vucic announced that elections (parliamentary and local) will be held on March or April 2020. Opposition said that if its requests will not be fulfilled, elections will be boycotted. Apart from that Vucic said that he will withdraw from his party (SNS) leadership next year. Regarding Belgrade – Pristina dialogue there is nothing to be expected in the near future; the whole process has reached a deadlock. Armed Forces are in high operational readiness without any deployment of units across Serbia – Kosovo

border. Serbia strengthens its relations with Russia (and China) seeking stronger support regarding Kosovo case. Security situation is complex and uncertain especially after Police operations in Northern Kosovo (with Serbian majority population) which endangers the possibility of armed violence. None could predict Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation including) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. At the moment, Serbia looks like acting in accordance with the international law aiming at reducing tension in the region. In other words state's leadership is acting in a "reasonable" and "wise" way avoiding mistakes of the past which have isolated Serbia from the international community. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state.



SLOVENIA: July 9th, Prime Minister Marjan Sarec has dismissed ideas by senior Italian officials that a fence should be built on the Slovenian - Italian border, telling the National Assembly that such proposals had to be interpreted "in domestic policy context." "In talks with the Italian Government we will state that there are no reasons for fence; this is clear from the numbers ... Italy is not threatened by Slovenia's inactivity, and we will substantiate that," he said. Sarec made the comment when he was questioned by opposition MPs in Parliament on Tuesday about the recent launch of mixed Police patrols on the border, due to Slovenia's

failure to properly protect the "Schengen" border. Stressing that the number of people Italy returned to Slovenia had dropped by 17% in the first half of 2019 compared to the same period last year, Sarec said Slovenian Police has done all they could to protect the "Schengen" border and curb illegal migrations. Border patrols are "not a measure that would squeeze Slovenia out of the Schengen zone," as Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS) MP Branko Grims claimed, as Italy has such cooperation with all of its neighbors and Slovenia also had such mixed patrols on its other borders, according to Sarec. New Slovenia – Christian Democrats (Nova Slovenija – Krščanski Demokrati - NSi) Deputy Jernej Vrtovec wondered why Slovenia had proposed mixed patrols, labeling it an admission of its inability to control the "Schengen" border. Sarec stressed that it was not the Government that had proposed joint patrols; this was the result of an agreement at the level of both Police forces. According to Sarec, the key thing to dam migrations is that the EU's border agency FRONTEX to be deployed on Croatia's borders with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. Overall, border control is "a serious issue that the new EU Commission will have to tackle with all seriousness... Migrations will be with us for years to come ... the EU is not active in tackling these issues," he said, adding: "Schengen is de facto not working anymore." Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini recently suggested Italy might erect a fence on its border with Slovenia if joint Police patrols do not suffice to stop migrations, raising fears of a return to border checks that would severely disrupt life along the border. Social Democrats (Socialni Demokrati – SD) Deputy Matjaz Nemec thus urged Sarec to

take the initiative and invite the Prime Ministers of all countries on the Western Balkan migration route, including Italy and Austria, to jointly tackle the issue. (www.sta.si)

- July 10th, According to “*Delo*” daily the oral hearing at the European Court of Justice (ECJ) on the admissibility of Slovenia's lawsuit against Croatia over border arbitration showed Slovenia has the upper hand. How the 15-member senate sees the matter will be clear in a few months. It is even possible that only a portion of Slovenia's lawsuit will be ruled admissible. The Court realized it has a difficult case on the table. They have so far had fewer than ten cases of member states suing each other. The Slovenia -Croatia case is even more specific since it is the first one to deal with territory. Slovenia's arguments seem convincing and if the judges endorse them, Croatia will be left with nothing but to carry out the arbitration Tribunal's final award. Croatia has so far pretended to have nothing to do with this matter offering new negotiations. The first oral hearing showed a great degree of understanding for Slovenia's arguments, while Croatia was on the Defensive. (www.delo.si, www.sta.si)

- July 11th, Prime Minister Marjan Sarec may seek a confidence vote on the budget documents for 2020 and 2021 as a way of checking support for his minority Government statements by coalition partners suggest after a meeting on Thursday. “*This is a minority Government ... it is reasonable that the Prime Minister checks its support with a confidence vote,*” said Brane Golubovic, Deputy Group leader for the ruling Marjan Sarec List (Lista Marjana Šarca - LMS). Noting that 46 votes are needed in the 90-member

legislature in the event the National Council vetoes the budget like it vetoed the 2019 budget Golubovic said the confidence vote would check support for the Government “*among coalition partners and the non-coalition partner.*” Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratska Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) Deputy Group leader Franc Jursa likewise said a confidence vote is likely, while Igor Zorcic, Head of the Modern Centre Party (Stranka Modernega Centra - SMC) Deputy group noted that the budget would be the biggest political issue in autumn “*especially if the Prime Minister seeks a confidence vote.*” Coalition partners met for budget talks today after the Finance Ministry recently unveiled the budget framework for the next two years. Matjaz Han, Deputy Group leader for the Social Democrats (Socialni Demokrati – SD), said that the coalition is “*quickly united in this room, but we still have to get to the National Assembly.*” In the run-up to the 2019 budget, the Left (Levica) secured concessions on a number of policies, but some of them have not been implemented and the party is expected to decide this weekend if and under what conditions it will continue to support the Government. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability, the minority Government of Marjan Sarec has entered in a period of fragile balance due to the Left party announcement that it will re-assessed its support towards the ruling coalition. Left party is the key factor for Government's stability and viability by supporting it in the Parliament. Without the Left's support the

Government would be toppled and early elections should be called. Under these circumstances Prime Minister Marjan Sarec does not exclude a confidence vote together with the 2020 – 2021 budget adoption by the Parliament. Sarec seeks to bear his partners responsibilities towards the Government's support and either to stabilize his ruling coalition or to call early elections. At the moment it is assessed that none of the ruling coalition parties wish snap elections, however political developments in mid-July could not be excluded. Sarec has been proved of being flexible in Slovenia's politics so far achieving to balance adequately between different political trends. Looking in the future and next parliamentary elections he seeks to unify political forces belong to the ALDE family against SDS which keeps on being the most powerful political force in the country. The Government has to address several internal social issues (increase of minimum wage, health care, pensions etc). Border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia remains active with low scale skirmishes not excluded periodically. Slovenia implies that the ongoing border dispute may affect its decision regarding Croatia's membership candidacy in Schengen Zone. European Court of Justice (ECJ) has started its hearing for the case and both countries presented their arguments. It is stressed that relations between Croatia and Slovenia are in low level and an "underworld war" is ongoing (at political, diplomatic and intelligence context). The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed military force to support Police tasks. Announcement of the Italian Minister of Interior that he plans to build a fence in the Italian – Slovenian borders has brought

several reactions. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end.



TURKEY: July 11th, the EU is set to curb contacts and funding for Ankara in retaliation for what it calls Turkey's "illegal" drilling for gas and oil off Cyprus; the EU stands ready to ramp up sanctions further, a draft statement seen by Reuters news agency shows. In trying to take Ankara to task for what the EU sees as Turkish interference with Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone, the bloc is walking a thin line, careful not to antagonize an important partner. "Despite our best intentions to keep good neighborly relations with Turkey its continued escalation and challenge to the sovereignty of our member state Cyprus will inevitably lead the EU to respond in full solidarity," Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, said on Wednesday. On Thursday, national envoys in Brussels were discussing a joint decision to punish Turkey, a draft of which said "In light of Turkey's continued and new illegal drilling activities, the [EU] decides to suspend negotiations on the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement and agrees not to hold further meetings of the high-level dialogues for the time

being. The Council endorses the [European] Commission's proposal to reduce the pre-accession assistance to Turkey for 2020 and invites the European Investment Bank to review its lending activities in Turkey, notably with regard to sovereign-backed lending," it said. The statement added that the EU would be ready to introduce more restrictive measures against Turkey should Ankara continue drilling. In 2014-20, the EU was due to give Turkey 4.45 billion euro for political reforms, agriculture and other projects to help it prepare for eventual membership in the bloc. But last year, Brussels took away 175 million euro in protest over what it saw as deteriorating human rights in Turkey. The EU has said Ankara under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is moving further away from the bloc. But because the bloc needs Turkey in matters such as security and migration, an EU diplomat involved in the latest discussions told Reuters any future sanctions would be limited. *"It would only be targeting people linked to these specific illegal activities. We are trying to calibrate that carefully because we need Turkish cooperation on migration, NATO [and] countering terrorism,"* he said. *"Some member states rely on Turkey for energy transit, so we must tread carefully. Do not expect any wide economic sanctions,"* he concluded. Ankara on Wednesday rejected Greek and EU criticism that Turkish drilling off Cyprus was illegitimate. On the divided island of Cyprus, an internationally recognized Government is part of the EU but Turkey backs a breakaway area. On Thursday, Omer Celik, a Spokesperson for Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi - AKP), said sanctions against Ankara would be a huge mistake for the EU. *"The*

EU should act on principles instead of taking the Greek Cypriot side. A mutual mechanism must be formed, where the Turkish Cypriot side will be an equal party, and the sharing of profits are linked to a sound mechanism. That is how the crisis will be overcome," Celik said. While Nicosia was pushing for tougher language on sanctions, some other EU states were wary of shutting down all high-level channels of communication with Ankara, diplomats said, meaning the draft decision could still change. (www.aljazeera.com)

- July 12th, the first shipment of the Russian S-400 missile system has arrived in Turkey, according to the Turkish Defense Ministry, moving the NATO member closer to a new standoff with the US. The Ministry said in a statement that *"the first group of equipment"* of the advanced air defense system had been delivered to the Murted airbase outside the capital, Ankara. *"Delivery of parts belonging to the system will continue in the coming days,"* Turkey's Defense Industry Directorate said separately. *"Once the system is completely ready, it will begin to be used in a way determined by the relevant authorities,"* he concluded. Al Jazeera's Sinem Koseoglu, reporting from Istanbul, said *"As far as we have been told, the systems will be operational by October 2019."* She added that delivery crossed a red line set by the US. *"This is the point where the spat between Turkey and the US intensifies, because Washington says even the S-400 arriving in Turkey is a matter of US sanctions,"* she said. The US has strongly urged Turkey to pull back from the deal - the first such move between a NATO member and Russia - warning Ankara that it will face economic sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act if it goes

ahead with the purchase, reportedly costing more than 2 billion dollars. Washington has also said Turkey will not be allowed to participate in the program to produce hi-tech F-35 fighter jets. The US has repeatedly said that the Russian system is incompatible with NATO systems and is a threat to the F-35. Sanctions would mark a new low in the already-tense relations between Turkey and the US. Last year, the US imposed sanctions on Turkey over its detention of an American pastor, triggering a Turkish currency crisis. The sanctions were later lifted upon the pastor's release. The deal with Russia has also raised concerns in Western circles that Turkey is drifting closer to Moscow's sphere of influence. Ankara has refused to bow to US pressure, insisting that choosing which defense equipment to buy is a matter of national sovereignty. (www.aljazeera.com)



Arrival of first parts of the advanced air defense system S-400

(Photo source: www.msb.gov.tr)

- July 12th, Ankara has increased its military deployment near the Syrian border, including heavy weapons, armored vehicles and tanks. Reports suggest that more than 50 tanks and artillery batteries were deployed over the last two days near Tal Abyad, located next to Turkey's border district of Akcakale and an area controlled

by the Syrian Kurds People's Protection Units (YPG). While Ankara's frustration due to Washington's indifference on removing YPG terrorists has been known for a long time, the meetings organized by some Gulf countries to support the YPG could be the tipping point for Ankara to launch an extensive military offensive, reports and experts have indicated. *"The latest deployments and tactical mobility on the ground have very strong indications for an offensive east of the Euphrates,"* Abdullah Agar, a former military officer and security expert, said Thursday. Along with a large military deployment, there has been extraordinary activity on the Syrian side of the border. While all Free Syrian Army (FSA) divisions in northern Syria's al-Bab and Jarablus are on full alert, FSA Commanders were summoned to Ankara to make evaluations and discuss details of the offensive, according to reports. Meetings were carried out with tribe leaders and non-governmental organization representatives from the region. In his column yesterday, Yeni Safak daily's Editor-in-Chief İbrahim Karagul highlighted the increasing presence of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in YPG-held areas with US coordination and the plans of some European countries to deploy more soldiers in northern Syria. *"The east of the Euphrates is a matter of existence for Turkey. If Ankara could have intervened in the region to date, it would not be surrounded in the Eastern Mediterranean,"* Karagul said, referring to the attempts by some countries, notably Greece, the Greek Cypriot administration of Southern Cyprus and Egypt, to diminish Turkey's activity in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey has long been stalling a possible operation east of the Euphrates to end the

presence of YPG, which Ankara says pose a grave security threat due to their affiliation with the PKK organization. Last December, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Ankara temporarily halted operations to wait a little longer until U.S. troops had completely withdrawn from the region, as announced by the U.S. President Donald Trump. However, after eight months, Washington has not taken any steps in this regard. Also, the two NATO allies reached the Manbij deal last June to accelerate the withdrawal of the YPG from Manbij. The agreement became yet another promise that the US has been dragging its feet on to implement. Also, some Gulf countries, particularly, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, conducted meetings with high-level YPG Commanders in recent months. In May, Anadolu Agency (AA) reported that Saudi military consultants held a meeting with YPG Commanders in the Ayn al-Arab district, also known as Kobani, and promised to deliver monetary support. During the fight against DAESH, the US opted to partner with the YPG, despite its NATO ally security concerns, and provided truckloads of weapons to the terrorist group. Some 22,000 truckloads of arms and ammunition have been given to the YPG, so far. Some of the arms include cruise missiles, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) and shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles (MANPADS). The delivery of arms and equipment to the YPG, which is still poisoning bilateral relations between Turkey and US, began in 2014 and intensified in subsequent years. The presence of these weapons has been a cause of concern for Ankara, threatening the stability of northern Syrian areas that were liberated from DAESH during operation “Euphrates Shield” and operation “Olive

Branch”. There are also other serious possible threats to Turkey, including the possibility of the transfer of these US-made weapons to southeast Turkey through the border controlled by the YPG to be used against the Turkish army by PKK. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Turkish – US relations has entered in a new phase after the start of S-400 advanced air defense system deliveries by Russia. Turkish Defense Ministry released photos and videos from the arrival of the first parts of the system giving a triumphant sense in the whole process. The US closely follows situation expecting their reaction. The threat of sanctions is still on the table, although the Turkish administration worked systematically last two weeks in order to convince public opinion that the US President backs down from his firm stance. However, taking into consideration that Turkey is a pivotal country enjoying geopolitical importance and having one of the largest militaries (the 2nd within NATO) it is hard to assess that the US seek a full rift with its NATO ally. On the contrary, there are still open official and unofficial channels of communication working on a mutual accepted compromise. The US needs Turkey and the opposite, especially in a period where Middle East is in turbulence. Economic recession does not help the Turkish President to strengthen his position internally undermining his political power. Turkey is heading in a major economic crisis. Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country

moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. EC Progress Report on Turkey was disappointing “freezing” any further development regarding its accession process. Moreover, the EU has presented a draft of imposing sanctions to Turkey due to illegal drilling for gas and oil off Cyprus. Turkish Armed Forces declares its readiness to intervene militarily in Syria, eastern of Euphrates river reinforcing their troops. According to information the invasion and attack against Syrian Kurd YPG is imminent. Such an operation without the US “green light” may further deteriorate relations of the two countries. Operation “Claw” against PKK in north Iraq has entered in a new phase inaugurating operation “Claw 2”. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. In Eastern Mediterranean Turkey continues its drilling operations with two ships (Fatih and Yavuz) maintaining a tense situation. Turkey is determined to react even with violence if its interests are harmed. The cost so far, for Turkey, is zero achieving simultaneously to question Cypriot sovereign rights. EU declarations for supporting Cyprus sovereign rights and possible sanctions (in a light form) are not enough to force Turkey to back down. It is assessed that Turkey is fully determined to escalate tension in the region including armed


violence (if it is necessary) aiming at securing its interests. Taking into consideration that Cyprus and Greece act in coordination and the latter guarantees defense and security of Cyprus it cannot be excluded an accidental or pre-planned “hot incident” in Cyprus or the Aegean Sea (not likely scenario during summer).


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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. Low tension incidents.

 Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. Violent incidents or armed violence in specific regions. Ongoing tension or crisis. High security risk.

 Evolving or ongoing crisis including major armed violence or violent/armed conflict. Civil, inter-state or non –state actors war.