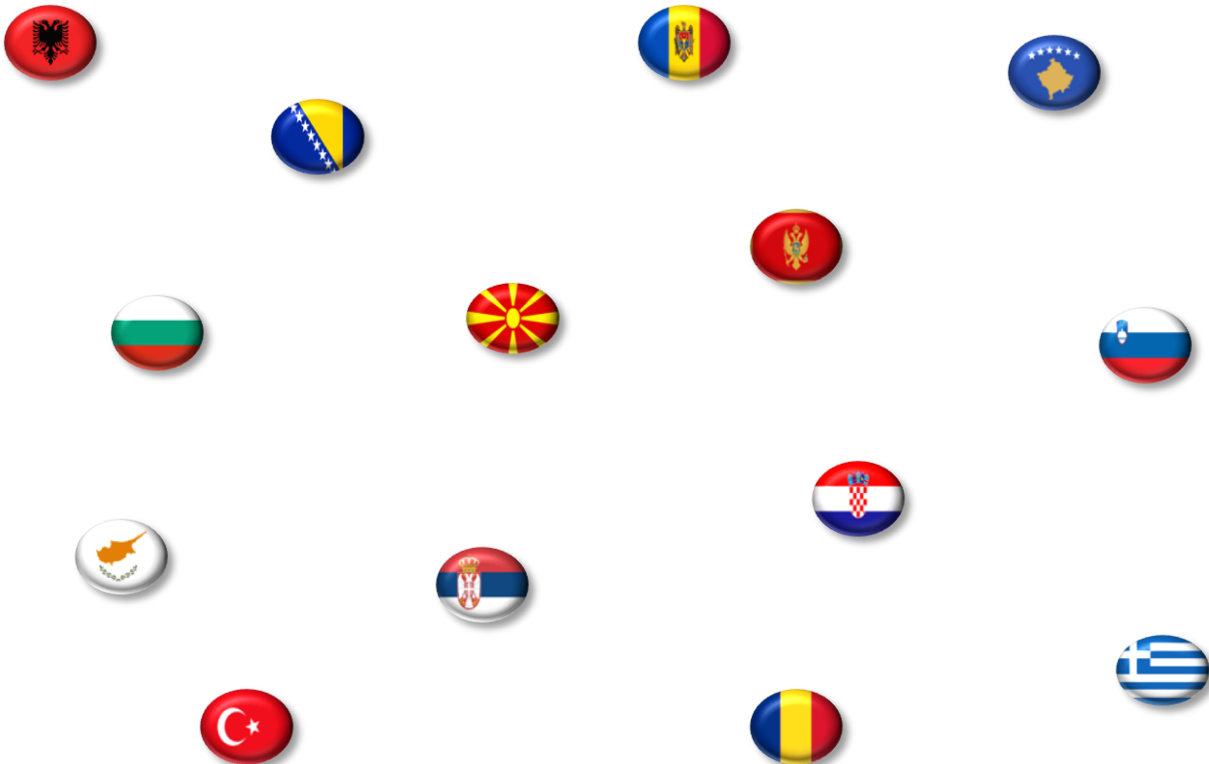




**Hermes Institute of
International Affairs,
Security & Geoeconomy**

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: May 22nd, as part of the EU's goal to provide protection against illegal immigration at its external borders, FRONTEX will establish a police troop equipped with weapons and other means to help Albanian Police to manage and secure the Albanian-Greek border. It is the first time in FRONTEX history, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, that such an operation is undertaken in order to protect a border from cross-border migration and criminality. Currently, 50 Police officers from different EU countries, 16 patrol cars and one machine for immigrant thermal identification have been established at the border between Albania and Greece to support our country in the fight against immigration and cross-border crime. Frontex officers in exceptional cases will be able to take over the powers of the Albanian Police, acting on behalf of and in the account of the Albanian state. This operation – part of the agreement, the first of its kind, signed on October 5th, 2018 by representatives of the EU and the Albanian Government – is a direct measure that the EU is undertaking to stop illegal immigration and drugs coming from Albania. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- May 24th, the Albanian President, Ilir Meta, reiterated his deep concern about the institutional and political crisis. Meta said that he is ready to review the decree for appointing the date of local elections, and decree a new date for holding them. Meta also declared that he will keep defending the Constitutional principles of the country, and will keep identifying all cases that may put these principles at risk. Given the German Parliament's statements that the local elections without the

opposition's participation will be problematic in terms of facilitating a truly democratic process, Meta wrote that the President has the responsibility to “*protect political pluralism by ensuring fair competition and free and fair elections.*” At the end of his statement, Meta stated that he is willing to give up and resign as President, “*if the parties also consider this element as important for a comprehensive solution.*” (www.top-channel.com, www.tiranatimes.com)

- May 26th, Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD), Lulzim Basha they will not hand over their rights and freedoms. His reaction came shortly after the Prime Minister, Edi Rama wrote his 5th public letter to Basha congratulating him on peaceful protest and inviting him to dialogue. Basha stated that there will be no step backwards by the opposition, adding that opposition's power is unification and resistance. “*We are people of Europe, we are people of freedom, we are people of democracy. We are people who believe in values, in human dignity, in family, in homeland. We do not hand over democracy; we do not hand over rights and freedoms. Fighting for them is the greatest and noble mission of free man. Fight against evil is freeing our society and nation,*” Basha said. Next protest will be held on May 31st, 2019; the same day that the Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS) plans to open its electoral campaign. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Albania has entered in a period of political turmoil and fragile political stability not only

because opposition organizes huge protests against the Government, but because opposition MPs decided to abandon Parliament and resign aiming at blocking Parliament's works. Such decision was strongly criticized by the international community namely the EU and U.S putting at risk the opening of accession negotiations in June 2019. Albanian political crisis is getting deeper and deeper undermining Albania's EU future. Local elections scheduled for June 30th, 2019 is the milestone of rapid political developments in the country. The ruling socialists push by any mean to conduct the elections, while opposition declares that there will be no elections. Escalation of tension including violent incidents is highly expected as we approach to the election date. PD and LSI leaders, Basha and Kryemadhi respectively pushing for the Government's topple and snap elections. International community strongly supports Rama urging opposition to follow parliamentary procedures avoiding its unconventional practices. It is not normal for a stable country seeking to enter the European club to face such situation of political abnormality. Opposition MPs' resignation aiming at forcing the Government in collapse is not a reasonable political strategy for a functional and stable democracy. It is assessed that Rama is stabilizing situation eliminating possibilities for snap elections. 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. The final decision for opening Albania's accession negotiations in June 2019 is up to the EU Heads of Governments. One should underline that unofficial concerns have already been raised regarding this date due to current political instability. Failure of opening accession talks with the EU it will further destabilize the country toppling the Government. 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.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

May 20th, Bosnia is not ready to be an EU candidate country, at this moment, the leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE), Hans van Baalen told N1 adding that if Bosnian and EU politicians start working on this issue, Bosnia could become a candidate country in the next two years. "I am ready to defend this idea if all the questions are answered, and if we have a realistic perspective to have a functional state. I must say that Bosnia has not proved that it can work as a functional modern country," van Baalen said. Van Baalen, who is a member of the Dutch Liberal Party (the VVD), said that Bosnia must become an efficient state. "There are too many Governments here and too many conflicts between them. Like other

countries, you also must fight against corruption and illegal things like mafia activities and you must genuinely build an efficient state. That is the kind of country that could become an EU member state,” he said, adding that *“Bosnia is a European country and one day it could become an EU member state with its delegates in the European Parliament.”* He concluded that all the parties in the country should work towards having a good administration, which is vital for the EU accession. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- May 21st, In December 2018, NATO’s Headquarters in Brussels sent a call to Bosnia and Herzegovina to submit its first Annual National Program (ANP) only as *“the next important step in the partnership between BiH and NATO,”* is quoted in the NATO Staff Staff’s Annual Gazette in a national plan published on NATO’s Facebook. The ANP is a technical document, a list of reform priorities and goals that BiH prepares, helping to guide the reform processes and activities, which can help BiH to make progress on effective defense and security capabilities, better response to natural disasters, greater interoperability with NATO members and partners. *“NATO fully recognizes the sovereignty and independence of the country,”* the statement states. *“It is on Bosnia and Herzegovina, to adopt the decision on the call and submit its first Annual National Program,”* it was stated by NATO Headquarters Sarajevo. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- May 25th, Speaking about the political situation and the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, member of BiH’s Presidency Zeljko Komsic said that any plan aimed at dividing BiH should be opposed. He stressed that the further disintegration of BiH should be stopped, which

was saved through the amendments to the Election Law. *“At this point, the Election Law is a danger, and even those plans that are presented halfway where it is suggested that BiH should be a confederation, and that is a plan for dividing Bosnia,”* Komsic said. When asked about the European Commission’s opinion, which BiH should receive in June, Komsic said that during a visit by a European official, *“there will be no enlargement whatsoever.”* Speaking of BiH path to NATO, Komsic said that BiH received MAP in Tallinn in 2010. Fulfillment of MAP is the next step in front of full membership. He said that the first Annual National Plan had been completed but no one had sent it to Brussels or had any special decision. *“This is a technical matter, there is no need for a decision,”* Komsic said, recalling that in Article 83 of the Defense Act he mentions NATO, and Dodik is now offering a mandate to a man who will not respect the law. Asked how he comments the invitation of Dodik for members of the Armed Forces BiH to wear uniforms on Army of Republika Srpska on May 12, Komsic says it is a call to revolt. Komsic said that at no cost he would agree on the division of the country and that it was the motive for him to enter into power together with the SDA and the SBB parties, Federal News Agency reports. (www.sarajevotimes.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) have reached an agreement to cooperate in forming a Government. It seems that the three parties achieved to bypass their different views on main issues and especially 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. 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. Establishment of auxiliary Police Unit by RS raised tension between the FBiH and the Serbian entity emerging the mistrust between the state's communities. 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. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests.



BULGARIA: May 22nd, Bulgaria's Premier Boyko Borissov and his Greek counterpart Alexis Tsipras turned the first sod of the gas interconnector Komotini-Stara Zagora. The future gas interconnector is important for the whole region and for Europe as well and will contribute to real diversification of the gas sources and the gas routes, Premier Borissov said. The 182 kilometer-long gas pipeline will be built until 2020. The project is estimated at 113 million euro and will have the capacity to transfer between 3 and 5 billion cubic meters per year. The two premiers discussed the construction of roads and railway lines connecting the ports on the Danube River and the Black Sea with the Aegean coast. Premiers Borissov and Tsipras also discussed digital infrastructure and connectivity in the Balkans. The development of investments, tourism and transport depends on the development of our joint projects, Premier Borissov added. (www.novinite.com)

- May 25th, bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Germany are excellent, of strategic importance, and relations with Bavaria are the most active and dynamically developing among the German federal provinces. This was stated by Prime Minister Boyko Borisov during his meeting

with the Prime Minister of the Free State of Bavaria, Dr. Markus Soder which took place in the Bavarian State Office in Munich, the Government information office said. Talks between Borisov and Soder were the continuation of the successful and productive meeting they held in Sofia in early May. Today, the focus of the discussions was on economy and investment. Prime Minister Markus Soder noted that he was impressed by how many German factories were opened in Bulgaria. *“We strive to develop innovative productions with high added value and to improve the opportunities for technology development,”* Borisov told Soder. Borisov said that Bulgaria is actively working for even better conditions for attracting investors, including by reforming vocational education and training qualified staff, by reducing the administrative burden and the development of industrial zones. People want security, high income, want to see development, we are doing right now. No slogans, but factories, investments, industrialization. This was stated by Prime Minister Boyko Borissov before journalists in Munich after meeting with Soder. Borisov pointed out that many German factories were open in Bulgaria, especially in the automotive industry, which, in addition to being created, subsequently expanded their production. The Bulgarian Prime Minister noted that active contacts are taking place between the Bulgarian and Bavarian businesses so that the two economies can be maximally united. *“They like us, they know that we are a stable and disciplined state, we are a family in every sphere,”* added Borisov and emphasized the fruitful cooperation with many other federal provinces. (www.novinite.com)

- May 26th, according to the Gallup International at 19:00, the ruling Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) receives 30.5% of the vote. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP), is in second place with 25.4% and in the third place is the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi - DPS) with 12.8%. According to Gallup, two more parties and coalitions pass the barrier of 5.88 and will have a representative in the European Parliament - IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO – Bulgarsko Natsionalno Dvizhenie) with 8% and Democratic Bulgaria with 6.5%. The Gallup forecast gives 6-7 MEPs for GERB, 5-6 for BSP, 2-3 for MRF, 1-2 for VMRO and 1 for Democratic Bulgaria. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Bulgaria has not entered yet in political instability but a potential major crisis is always a possibility. The 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. It looks like ruling GERB wins the European elections strengthening its position in the internal political scene. The President Radev grabs every opportunity to criticize the Government (and the Prime Minister Borissov) highlighting his different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Opposition BSP tries to push further Borisov and

his Government by strengthening its rhetoric and having tabled three motions of no confidence so far. 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: May 21st, Ambassador Hu Zhaoming said during a conference the building of the Peljesac Bridge by a Chinese company would provide new opportunities and momentum for economic cooperation with the world's second-largest economy. The Ambassador added that a dozen memoranda were signed between the two countries at a recent forum in Dubrovnik, and not just regarding infrastructure but in other areas as well. *“We signed a memorandum of understanding for the Nizinska railway line, which will improve connections with*

the seaports in Rijeka with the rest of Europe,” said Zhaoming. *“After the Chinese firm CIBC was selected to build the Peljesac Bridge, cooperation between China and Croatia has taken on a new dimension. More and more Chinese companies are interested in investing in projects in Croatia; and not just infrastructure, but in science, technology, and tourism.”* Tomislav Mihotic, the State Secretary at the Ministry of the Sea, Transport, and Infrastructure, said there were plenty of opportunities for further investment from abroad, as well as the withdrawing of more EU funds. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- May 23rd, Defence Minister Damir Krsticevic said the Government remained resolute to resolve the strategic issue of procuring fighter jets and that it was discussing it with Sweden and the US. Speaking to the press after the Government adopted a defense report for 2018, he said the incumbent Government is bolstering and modernizing the Croatian Army in a systematic and organized way. Krsticevic said Croatia and future generations needed fighter aircrafts, and that the procurement of fighter jets would be a huge technological step forward for the Croatian Armed Forces. He said that after talks with Israel failed, the procurement was being discussed with the US and Sweden. *“When we have concrete information, we will inform the public in a timely manner.”* In selecting the best bid, the team of experts in charge will *“think of what is best for Croatia,”* he said. *“We approximately know what the prices are,”* the Minister said, adding that in the procurement attempt with Israel and based on Bulgaria's and Slovakia's fighter aircraft purchases, Croatia had gained the necessary experience and that the crucial thing is that the

Government was determined to resolve this issue. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- May 26th, according to the first incomplete results of Sunday's election for the European Parliament released by the State Election Commission at 11 p.m., the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica - HDZ) won 23.21% of the vote, which is translated into five seats in the EP. The Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske - SDP) won 18.36% of the vote and three seats. One seat each was won by the Sovereignists with 8.29% of the vote, the Independent Slate of Mislav Kolakusic with 7.67%, Human Shield with 5.81% and the Amsterdam Coalition with 5.62% of the vote. The data was obtained from 89.69% of polling stations at which 83.71% of the ballots (914,664) was counted. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

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 enjoys political stability, while its economy is growing. Border dispute on Piran Bay remains active and Slovenia's initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. The state accelerates its efforts

towards accession in Schengen zone, while the EC sends good news regarding Croatia's fiscal policy. Croatia 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: May 22nd, the leaders of the People's Party (Halkın Partisi - HP), Kudret Ozersay and National Unity Party (Ulusal Birlik Partisi – UBP), Ersin Tatar on Wednesday submitted to Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci the list of names for a “cabinet” after agreeing to form a new “Government” following the collapse of the previous one some two weeks ago. Tatar will be the new “Prime Minister” while Ozersay will remain “Deputy Prime Minister” and “Foreign Minister,” the same posts he had held in the previous coalition. In that grouping, Ozersay’s HP had shared power with the Republican Turkish Party (Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi - CTP), the Communal Democracy Party (Toplumcu Demokrasi Partisi - TDP) and the Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti - DP). After signing the new protocol in “Parliament” Tatar and Ozersay headed to Akinci’s office to submit the list with the names of their administration. The protocol said that the two parties share a common approach as regards the Cyprus problem and are open to alternative solution models. Agreement between HP and UBP comes as no surprise to many who argue the collapse of the four-party coalition was orchestrated by Turkey in a bid to see in power parties aligned with its policies on

the Cyprus problem and other issues. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 22nd, one of the Defense Ministry's main objectives in 2019 will be to plan the expansion of the naval base at Mari to be capable of hosting French navy vessels, Minister Savvas Angelides said on Wednesday. Speaking at a news conference, Angelides said the expansion of the base is linked to a military cooperation deal with France. Earlier this month, Angelides signed a letter of intent with his French counterpart Florence Parly. The document provides for the use of the "*Evangelos Florakis*" naval base by the French navy. The official statement said the purpose of the agreement is "*to strengthen the naval capabilities of the Republic of Cyprus and broad strategic cooperation for the benefit of the maritime forces of the two states.*" As part of PESCO, the EU's joint military investment and project development program, Cyprus has set the upgrading of its infrastructure as a priority, Angelides said. The Minister outlined the six pillars of action on which his ministry's objectives are based. First and foremost is the reinforcement of bilateral relations and military cooperation with other states, which includes regional cooperation, improving relations with the USA and EU, and Search and Rescue operations. "*The Government's careful moves in recent years have reinforced Cyprus' role in the EU and turned it into a credible factor of stability, a regional pillar of cooperation, and contributor of security in the area,*" Angelides said. From then on, the Ministry aims to strengthen the National Guard's operation capability, reform and reorganize the department and the army command, maximize utilization of available fiscal

resources and boost the budget, simplify legislation and bolster human resources. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 24th, President Nicos Anastasiades stressed to UN Secretary General's Special Representative in Cyprus Elizabeth Spehar the need for UNFICYP to remain especially as Turkish provocations are ongoing, Government Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said. Anastasiades received Spehar at the presidential palace on Friday an official request by the UN ahead of the discussion by the Security Council in July on the Secretary-General's report relating to UNFICYP's mandate, which will be up for renewal. Following Friday's meeting, Prodromou said the President expressed the belief that UNFICYP's mandate would be renewed. Spehar told reporters that it was a very good meeting and they "*covered a number of issues in light of the upcoming (Security) Council session in July.*" She had a meeting on the same matter earlier in the month with Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci. According to Prodromou, Anastasiades highlighted during the meeting the problems created due to Turkey's illegal actions at sea against the Republic of Cyprus. "*The President also underlined the need for the UN peacekeeping force to be present in Cyprus particularly when there are provocations by Turkey and expressed the belief that UNFICYP's mandate will be renewed, with the UN's contribution to this end,*" he said. "*We believe and we underline that as long as the Turkish occupation of the island continues and there are incidents as the recent ones concerning the ceasefire line and the provocations of Turkey against the Republic of Cyprus, it is imperative that UNFICYP remains*

on the island,” Prodromou said. The peacekeeping force is playing a stabilizing role, he said. As regards prospects for the resumption of the negotiations on the Cyprus problem, Anastasiades expressed his readiness to the UN, Prodromou said, *“While on the other hand, Turkey has been following delaying tactics on this issue.”* (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus faces an ongoing crisis with the Turkish drillship Fatih invading within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) ready to start oil and gas drills 50 nm west of Pafos. Direct violation of its sovereign rights which aim at establishing “fait accompli” in a maritime area Turkey claims it enjoys full rights to exploit, is a serious evolving situation which should be resolved in terms of crisis management under pressure conditions. It looks like Cyprus (and Greece) did not have a resolution plan for such situation although it was an expected and predicted Turkish reaction. Diplomatic support of the US and EU through statements is not enough to deter Turkey from its operational plans. Cyprus should push the EU for specific sanctions against Turkey as a direct measure of pressure. What Cyprus really needs at the moment is the presence of aeronautical forces to protect its interests and sovereignty and this lack of military force is a major gap for exercising its sovereign rights. To conclude, Cyprus should stop immediately this situation which threatens its national sovereignty. Escalation of tension including armed violence could not be excluded. In an important and decisive step, Cyprus filed officially to the UN the coordinates for the northern (not delimited)

part of its EEZ, something it had not done previously demolishing Turkey’s argument that it is a disputed (grey) area. UK differentiated its stance compared to the US and EU speaking about “a disputed area” provoking Cyprus harsh reaction. Cyprus signed a letter of intent with France strengthening its military cooperation. In fact France will use Cypriot naval facilities entering in a region was traditional under UK influence. 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. At the moment, Cyprus is engaged in three different trilateral formations which also include strong features of strategic cooperation and alliance; Cyprus – Egypt – Greece, Cyprus – Israel – Greece, and Cyprus – Jordan – Greece. The last two are highly improved due to the US engagement. At the moment Cyprus is promoting a fourth model of cooperation between Cyprus, Greece, and Lebanon. In other words, Cyprus is becoming the “leading link” between the Middle East and the Arab world on the one hand and the EU on the other. 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 administration promotes abolishment of the arms embargo against Cyprus allowing it to improve its military capabilities. Conduct of aeronautical exercises in cooperation with other countries (Israel, Egypt etc) sends various messages of defense capability, readiness, and determination. Although the UN Secretary General appears optimistic for a new round of talks between the two communities, it is assessed that talks could not be resumed with vessels violating Cypriot sovereignty. President Anastasiades promotes the scenario of a “bizonal, bicomunal decentralized federation”; an idea which is in principle accepted by the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community and enjoys support from the U.S. However, there are a lot of disputed issues in which both parts should compromise; the most important is considered the decision-making process. 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: May 23rd, Defense Minister Evangelos Apostolakis said on Thursday that ongoing talks between Greek and Turkish military delegations in Athens are solely focused on confidence-building measures between the two countries and remarks that they are anything beyond that are “*out of touch with reality.*” Apostolakis’ comments follow the assertion on

Wednesday by his Turkish counterpart Hulusi Akar that he instructed his country’s delegation to place all the differences dividing Athens and Ankara in the Aegean, Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean “*on the table.*” Speaking to reporters on Thursday, Apostolakis said discussions have gone well and this week’s meeting will not be the last. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 26th, an official projection from the Interior Ministry is giving opposition New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) 32.8% of the vote for European Parliament elections, against 24% for governing Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA). According to Singular Logic, the IT firm responsible for the election results, center-left Movement for Change (Κίνημα Αλλαγής – KINAL) is seen in third place with 7.8%, the Greek Communist Party (Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας - KKE) is in fourth with 5.5% and neo-Nazi Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή – ΧΑ) is seen slipping to fifth with 4.9%, just ahead of pro-Christian nationalist Greek Solution (Ελληνική Λύση) with 4.1%. (www.ekathimerini.gr)

- May 26th, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has called for an early national election following the defeat of his party at the European Parliament elections. Tsipras said from the Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) party offices that “*the result does not rise to our expectations ... I will not ignore it or quit.*” The Government's term expires in October and before Sunday night's announcement, Government officials insisted that elections would be held at the end of the term. Tsipras said he will visit the Greek President to

request the early dissolution of Parliament after the second round of local and regional elections on June 2nd, 2019. This puts the election date at June 30th, 2019 at the earliest. (www.ekathimerini.gr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling SYRIZA was strongly defeated in the European and local elections by opposition conservatives ND. Under these circumstances the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras was forced to call for early parliamentary elections most probably on June 30th, 2019. SYRIZA is looking for a “miracle” in order to overturn political atmosphere and is assessed that its defeat will be even larger in the national elections. ND will focus to achieve a full majority in the coming elections in order to form a stable Government. Former ruling coalition partner Independent Greeks was disappeared from political map. Afterwards, Greece faces an extensive electoral period which undermines state’s function and economy. On the other hand it is a period that Greece faces diplomatic and security challenges mainly by Turkey. Internal terrorism is considered as a major unresolved problem of national security undermining stability of the state. Greek – Turkish relations are deteriorating 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 and Greece’s right to militarize East Aegean Sea islands. 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 intensified their activity regarding violation of Greek airspace and issue of NAVTEXs within Greek territorial waters for military exercises (including fires). Strengthening of military cooperation between Greece and the U.S 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.



KOSOVO: May 22nd, leaders of the two biggest opposition parties, Albin Kurti from Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) and Isa Mustafa from the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) met on Wednesday to coordinate, as they say, on filing a no-confidence motion against Ramush Haradinaj’s Government. Kurti, in a social media post said that he discussed with Mustafa on political situation and preparations on overthrowing the Government. “Citizens want a new good, fair Government and not this misgovernment which has increased foreign debt,

misuses budget and bankrupt enterprises. We agreed to make necessary preparations for overthrowing Government,” Kurti wrote. Mustafa, in a separate statement said that situation in Kosovo is worsening, mentioning corruption, unemployment, nepotism and migration of young people. Mustafa said Kosovo needs a new Government and called on the LDK members to work on early elections in the country. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- May 23rd, Kosovo Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj, said that it is highly unlikely for Kosovo to get visa liberalization with the EU Schengen area in June 2019. According to Haradinaj, the EU is likely to take a positive decision on waving visas for Kosovo citizens in autumn this year. Haradinaj reiterated that Germany’s “Yes” to visa-free regime for Kosovo is turning point in this process, adding however that this issue should be included in the agenda of the next meeting of EU Council in Brussels. “We think Germany’s position is a turning point. Including in the agenda is very important. Now Romania hold the EU’s presidency until 1st of July. I do not think that a positive recommendation will be given in June. But we are in a process. I think that in autumn we will hear good news,” Haradinaj said. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- May 24th, Goran Rakic, head of Serbian List (Srpska Lista), the biggest political entity of Serbs in Kosovo, addressing media after meeting Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic in Belgrade said that they are ready to resign again, if there is no common language with Kosovo institutions. Rakic’s threat of resignation came days after Serbian List backed by Belgrade won

extraordinary mayoral elections in the four Serb majority municipalities in northern Kosovo. Rakic who was former Mayor of Mitrovica North and three other Serb Mayors of Zvecan, Zubin Potok and Leposavic resigned in November last year protesting Kosovo Government’s decision to introduce 100% tax on all Serbian goods. Kosovo’s President Hashim Thaci announced early elections which were held on May 19th, 2019. The Serbian List won the election in the four municipalities with over 90% of votes. The newly elected Mayors, who are yet to take the oath before Kosovo institutions, decide to meet Serbian President Vucic and Head of Serbia’s Government Office, Marko Djuric, after the landslide victory last Sunday. Rakic warned that they are ready to resign again. “*The newly elected Mayors are ready to leave institutions if there is no understanding from Pristina,*” Rakic said. He said that in addition to Mayors, also other Kosovo Serb officials of all levels would leave Kosovo institutions. “*If this is the case than it will be applied in all levels, including judges and prosecutors and teachers,*” Rakic said, according to media in Belgrade. Rakic thanked Serbian President Vucic for as he said “*commitment and everything he does*” to help Serbs in Kosovo. Vucic it was the first to announce prior the mayoral elections took place that Serbian List Mayors, if confirmed, might offer resignation again. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo hardens its stance setting more and more obstacles in restarting of Belgrade – Pristina dialogue. After Haradinaj’s decision to impose 100% tax on Serbian and Bosnian products which

has led negotiation process into a deadlock, the Kosovo Assembly adopted a resolution that Serbs committed genocide during 1998-1999 war. Under these circumstances it is rather difficult to see tangible results in next meeting scheduled for July 2019. 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. The state's authorities show a tendency of escalating tension with Serbia undermining a peaceful resolution of the case. By imposing 100% tariff on Serbian (and Bosnian products), establishing Kosovo army, executing Special Forces operation in northern Kosovo, arresting Serbs, and requesting special court for Serbs it is created a climate which does not facilitate dialogue and the establishment of confidence between the two parties. President Thaci insists once again on Kosovo – Serbia land swap but only for Kosovo annexation of Presevo, Medvja and Bujanovac where ethnic Albanians are the majority. Mayoral elections in the North (of Serbian majority) were held on May 19th, 2019 without provocations or violent incidents. However, newly elected Serbian Mayors are ready to resign again blocking municipal normality in Kosovo north. 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. Establishment of Kosovo Army is also a factor of destabilization since there is always a possibility of Police or military engagement with Serbian forces. Kosovo seeks KSF 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. One should take into consideration that the Serb President has already ordered all defense and security stakeholders to take all necessary measures for protecting Serbian population in Kosovo.



MOLDOVA: May 22nd, Moldovan President Igor Dodon announced at a briefing that he has submitted a notification to the Constitutional Court to find out the deadline for the dissolution of the current legislature, in case no parliamentary majority will be created. He asked the Court to note when the three months should be calculated – since the day of validation of parliamentary elections or the day of session of parliament's formation. *“Most likely, there are two weeks, if no parliamentary majority is created within this term, I will have to dissolve the Parliament, and the elected deputies have to take the consequences,”* Dodon said. The Head of state added that citizens expect lawmakers to get to work and appoint a Government, and urged the elected officials to come up with a decision as soon as possible; creation of a majority or snap polls. The parliamentary elections took place on 24 February 24th, 2019. Four parties – the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM), Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM), ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS)] bloc and Republican Socio-Political Movement Equality (Mișcare Social-Politică Republicană Ravnopravie - SOR) party – made it to Parliament. So far, the political parties have

failed to create a parliamentary majority. (www.moldpres.md)

- May 22nd, the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) leader Andrei Nastase, and ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS)] bloc Co-Chairperson, stated at the news conference in the Parliament Building on Tuesday he is sure that there already exists a covert coalition – a parliamentary majority formed by the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM), Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) and Republican Socio-Political Movement Equality (Mișcare Social-Politică Republicană Ravnopravie - SOR) party. *“This coalition is already working against the interests of the State and citizens, and the responsibility for blocking the Parliament’s work is on nobody but this coalition,”* stated Nastase. *“They must pluck up their courage and publicly recognize the coalition existence. They must assume responsibility for the current social and economic crisis in the country, for the galloping prices on fuels and foodstuffs. They must say that in the absence of external funding the Government is forced to borrow money from banks, so the state debt is steadily growing,”* Nastase added. He stressed that in the conditions of a paralyzed Parliament and paralyzed Government fully controlled by mafia decisions on the nation’s future must be taken by free citizens. *“One of the main reasons why the regime is blockading the Parliament’s work is its ardent*

striving for preventing the law-stipulated ordinary local elections, particularly in Chisinau. I guess time has come for the Moldovan people to start preparing for massive actions of protest to be aimed against those who are torturing the country,” stated Nastase, whose victory in the last year’s Chisinau mayoral election was invalidated by the Court. (www.infotag.md)

- May 23rd, the Right-wing pro-European parliamentary ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS)] bloc organized before the Government Building a protest against sharply grown prices on many essential foodstuffs and oil products. Simultaneously, another protest was held nearby by those who disagree with the Right opposition’s actions. The ACUM manifestation involved over one hundred people, including both bloc Chairpersons Andrei Nastase and Maya Sandu. The protesters unfolded posters reading *“Down with high prices,” “Down with cartel arrangements,”* while they were chanting *“Plahotniuc – to prison,” “No to mafia”* etc. Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS) MP Radu Marian spoke out *“grounded suspicions”* that the recent surge of fuel prices was the product of a cartel collusion by importers. And the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) MP Alexandru Slusari assessed the grown prices on foodstuffs as *“a specimen of the economic model built by mafia in Moldova.”* The counter-manifestation gathered about a hundred people as well, who were waving posters containing insults against Maya Sandu and Andrei

Nastase. The Government Building was protected by a considerable strength of well-equipped Police officers whose number was not inferior to that of the protesters. PPDA leader Andrei Nastase stated that the anti-ACUM action was organized jointly by Plahotniuc, Dodon and Shor. *“This alliance of traitors is killing democracy in Moldova. Instead of working for the good of those who have elected him President, Igor Dodon is a servant to Plahotniuc – out of fear. But the regime’s accomplices are so few, just a handful, while free people are many. And that is why the criminal regime is doomed,”* Slusari said. (www.infotag.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political deadlock continues in Moldova after parties failed to form a ruling majority so far. It seems that PSRM and ACUM block failed to reach an agreement leaving “free space” for a PSRM and PDM approach and agreement. The fourth parliamentary party – SOR - also co-included last week in a possible majority agreement between PSRM and PDM. It is assessed that the three parties will form a Government next two weeks before the President Igor Dodon to dissolve Parliament and call for early parliamentary elections. Political instability and uncertainty affect vitally in state’s function blocking reforms, harming economy and keeping the country far from European standards. Pro-European ACUM assessing that a Government formation is ongoing decided to move in a more activist reaction by organizing protests; an action which definitely polarizes political atmosphere. Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the

other. Political situation in the country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which will strengthen state’s transparency, accountability, and democratic values. The current Government has walked into dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime and deep and determined justice reforms are needed. The U.S, EU and IMF express their major concerns. 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 go unnoticed by international stakeholders. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: May 20th,

Montenegro is clearly oriented towards the EU and NATO and that is exactly the fundamental prerequisite for the improvement of life quality, said the Prime Minister, Dusko Markovic in an interview for German Euroactiv. He pointed out that Montenegrin economy is one of the fastest growing economies in Europe and that we it had received over 1.5 billion euro of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). As for the relations with Russia, he said they are at very low administrative level. Due to our NATO membership, we are not having any political talks with Russia, the Prime Minister said. *“Russia opposed to our NATO membership. It endorsed the forces in Montenegro that are against the NATO membership. That is why they meddled into the elections. If the pro-European forces had not won*

the elections in 2016, NATO accession would not have been successful,” Markovic said. He added that Montenegro had for long been exposed to hybrid threats, including false reports. Speaking about Montenegro’s progress towards the EU he said *“We have 32 chapters open. Three chapters have been closed temporarily and we are ready to close seven more. Hopefully, we will be able to do that by the end of this year. We have strengthened our institutions, judicial system, state administration, we have established new institutions, today Montenegro looks differently than eight years ago,”* pointed out Markovic. According to him, corruption is still a problem, but not as serious as it was before. *“Organized crime is the biggest problem today, not only in Montenegro but internationally. In order to respond to that, we have set up Special Prosecutor’s Office which has already convicted many, even highly-positioned state officials, members of my party,”* Markovic said. Speaking about protests, Prime Minister pointed out that they are democratic right of every citizen. *“Protests can make the government think why people are protesting. Initial spark was the bank that went bankrupt because its owners were engaged in criminal activities. Then, everything was followed by a negative campaign against the President, Milo Djukanovic, who refused to protect the owners. Later, political opposition used that as a motive to support protests, get the support of masses and make requests that have gradually have become political,”* Markovic said. (www.cdm.me)

- May 22nd, conviction over the alleged coup attempt in Montenegro made on October 16th, 2016 is a proof that Montenegrin justice system is

definitely politicized and subject to the manipulations from the outside, said the Department for Information and Press of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs while pointing out that it will additionally worsen Russia-Montenegro relations. *“Once again, we categorically deny taking part in the incriminating attempts to organize illegal actions and we find such accusations completely groundless. The Court’s decision is the element of the conjuncture internal political struggle, whose objective is the elimination of the opponents of the current Government,”* reads the response of the Department for Information and Press of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (www.cdm.me)

- May 25th, new elections in Kotor would be the worst possible option, the President of the Liberal Party of Montenegro (Liberalna Partija Crne Gore - LPCG) and member of the Parliament, Andrija Popovic, told in an interview with Dnevne Novine daily. *“Elections cannot be held before September. This means the employees will not receive salaries, tourism season might be under threat, and I really do not see how Kotor would survive such a state of play. This is a complete disaster and anarchy, and in case it lasts for too long, it is going to have catastrophic consequences. That is why I say elections would be the worst possible solution so we must seek for another solution. Either the new majority in the local Assembly should elect the President or the government should establish the Board of Trustees based on the Local Government Law,”* noted Popovic. He also added he expects the proposal for the decision on amending the Parliament’s rules of procedure to be considered

and approved at the next Parliament's session. This initiative stemmed from the need to do something concrete in relation to those who have been boycotting the Parliament, according to Popovic and the proposed sanctions are milder than those applied by the Parliaments of the European states and neighboring countries. Proposal was drawn up based on a document prepared by the Research Center of the Parliament of Montenegro, which had analyzed sanctions for MPs boycotting parliament in 27 European and region's countries. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Massive 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. Protest movement and opposition parties reached an agreement to join forces for toppling the Government ensuring fair and free elections. However, it is assessed that protesters' movement has lost its "powerful pulse" and the Government is currently stable. Court verdict on DF members, Serbian and Russian citizens engaged in 2016 attempt coup was announced including high sentences for those involved. Although DF leadership implied strong protests and reactions nothing happened yet. Russian administration has warned that such decision may deteriorate further Montenegro – Russia relations. The country is fully integrating in the Euro-Atlantic structures declaring its dedication in its western orientated path. The EP assessment was positive praising the state's efforts to implement major reforms, but on the other hand it underlined the problems of the

rule of law, media freedom, corruption, money laundering, and organized crime. However, the EP stated that Montenegro under certain conditions may be able to access the EU by 2025. One should keep an eye on Montenegro's progress report that will be released on May 29th, 2019 by the EC. It is assessed that the EU and U.S 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; It is estimated that 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: May 22nd, by a decision of President Stevo Pendarovski, Erol Musliu was appointed to be the new Director of the Intelligence Agency (AR). Before this, he was an Assistant-Director at the Agency. Musliu has graduated at the Faculty for

Security in Skopje as one of the top students of his generations and after graduation, in 1994, he was hired at the Direction for Security and Counterintelligence, and he moved at the Intelligence Agency as soon as it was formed. The mandate of the current Director Zoran Ivanov ended today. By this decision, Pendarovski inaugurated his personnel policy in the security and intelligence structures that are under his jurisdiction. However, Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija – DUI) party, the junior partner in North Macedonia's ruling coalition, criticized on May 23rd, 2019 Musliu's appointment as the new National Intelligence Agency Chief. DUI alleged that Musliu might be implicated in wrongdoing during a shootout between ethnic Albanian gunmen and the security forces in the northern town of Kumanovo in May 2015 that left 18 people dead, including eight Police officers. Pendarovski defended Musliu, calling him “*a top professional.*” (www.meta.mk, www.balkaninsight.com)

- May 22nd, two fighter jets from the Hellenic Air Force carried out successful flights at a height of 1.5 kilometers over the airspace of North Macedonia, the Armed Forces General Staff told Meta. Patrol had been previously agreed with Greece, with a precise time, place of entry and exit, route and height. The aim of the flights on both planes – guide and escort – was to test radar coverage and communications. The final arrangement for protection of North Macedonia's airspace is yet to be agreed. During Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' visit to Skopje, Greece announced that it would patrol the state's airspace free of charge. Air patrols of a member state in

another member state's airspace are common with NATO's “*smart defense*” concept, which provides for joint use of available resources. Greek and Italian fighter jets currently carry out patrols over Albania and Montenegro. (www.meta.mk)

- May 23rd, Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev announced at the meeting with the Chambers of Commerce that he has made his decision to dismiss all of the Presidents of Social Democratic Union of Macedonia's (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) municipal branches and that is a part of the start of the changes that the citizens are expecting. Zaev said that during the first half of June it will be announced the changes that will occur at public institutions, the Ministries and the Government, in coordination with the coalition partner, the Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija – DUI). He said that he started from the municipal organizations because it was the simplest step; the current status allows him to implement his decision immediately, while further changes in higher levels depend on decisions made by SDSM's institutional bodies. (www.meta.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Implementing his decision for an extensive governmental reshuffle including not only Ministers and Deputy Ministers, but also top officials in state's institutions, the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev proceeded in dismissal of all municipal heads of SDSM. Election of SDSM's candidate, Stevo Pendarovski in the presidential post has facilitated Government's work improving state's functionality. The new President has already decreed 18 laws that his predecessor, Gjorge Ivanov refused to sign during his term.

VMRO-DPMNE declares that is the most powerful political force in the country insisting for early parliamentary elections. It is assessed that the EU will offer its support to Zaev by opening accession negotiations in coming summer (June – July 2019) strengthening his political power in the country. In a different case, VMRO-DPMNE will push further for snap elections and ruling SDSM will be in a very difficult situation. In other words, the country's political stability is in the EU hands. Enjoying the NATO accession process and opening of accession negotiations with the EU Zaev will strengthen his position feeling more comfortable to call for early elections. Ratification of NATO accession protocol by the member states proceeds rapidly. Although, there is concern for Turkey's ratification due to the fact that it tried to connect the North Macedonia accession process to NATO with its demands over FETO persecution, the Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister assured that his country will ratify the protocol soon. Moreover, it seems that Turkey does not welcome the strengthening of North Macedonia – Greece relations; one should note that Greece has taken over North Macedonia's airspace protection in the context of NATO. 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: May 24th, the party of ethnic Hungarians in Romania, Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR), broke the collaboration protocol with the ruling coalition formed by the Social Democratic

Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) and Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE). UDMR took this decision in response to the developments related to Valea Uzului where the Romanian authorities decided to bury Romanian war heroes in an international cemetery so far used by Hungarians only, Hotnews.ro reported. After the tombs of Romanian heroes were packed in black rubbish bags, the City Hall officials in the Hungarian-dominated village were subject to investigations seen by UDMR as an abuse. UDMR will no longer support the Government in any of its actions until the situation at Valea Uzului is settled in a satisfactory manner, UDMR President Kelemen Hunor said. However, the relationship was fragile before the events, sources commented. UDMR had already decided to break ties with the PSD - ALDE ruling coalition, but wanted to announce it after May 26th, 2019 elections for the European Parliament. UDMR breaking the relations with PSD-ALDE leaves the ruling coalition with a weak majority of 239 votes, only five more than the 234 needed for the simple majority in the joint Chambers of the Parliament. (www.romania-insider.com)

- May 26th, Prime Minister Viorica Dancila has announced that she does not consider the possibility of resigning from office, amid the disastrous Social Democratic Party's (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) result in the elections for the European Parliament. President Klaus Iohannis, the leaders of USR - PLUS and National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) have asked for her resignation, but Dancila said she does not consider it. *"The Romanians have confidence in the Government, now they have*

voted for the European Parliament, they did not vote for parliamentary elections, and if the Government is to be dismissed, a censure motion is needed, and if approved, then the Government is dismissed,” Dancila said. Later on Sunday, Dancila said for Antena 3 TV private broadcaster she does not intend to leave the Government. *“Definitely not, I will not resign, I think it is the 20th time when Iohannis asks for my resignation, but that does not mean we say yes. The Government can fall following a motion by the Parliament’s vote; if not, we will continue the Government program. I believe that a motion will not be voted,”* Dancila said. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- May 26th, Romania’s President Klaus Iohannis thanked Romanians for going to the polls in high numbers and for voting in his referendum on justice. He also congratulated the main opposition parties for their results and asked the ruling party to leave power after the low result it got in the EU elections. *“Good evening, dear Romanians, you are fantastic! I congratulate you! The turnout is sensational. We have about 50% turnout at the EU elections and 40% at the referendum. Dear Romanians, I thank you! You cast a clear and firm vote, which cannot be ignored by any politician in Romania. The referendum passed successfully. So, dear Romanians, you voted clearly and firmly for correct politics, for independent justice, for a good governing and for Romania,”* Iohannis said in his speech immediately after the polls closed and the exit poll results were announced. The exit poll showed the ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) and opposition parties National Liberal Party (Partidul

Național Liberal - PNL) and Alliance 2020 USR - Plus almost tied at around 25%. The President criticized PSD for the way they organized elections and the long queues at polling sections abroad. He also said the party’s score, much lower than at the parliamentary elections in December 2016, reflected its results (45%). *“The PSD Government must leave. This result cannot be interpreted in any other way,”* Iohannis said. (www.romani-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government has been transformed into an “open battle” undermining political stability of the country. Iohannis strongly opposes against Government’s plans to intervene in judicial system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state’s justice. Under these circumstances, Iohannis pushes ruling coalition to step down after its looming defeat. Although party leader, Liviu Dragnea and Prime Minister Viorica Dancila reject resignation, rapid political developments could not be excluded. Romania is running the Presidency of the Council of EU facing criticism and non-confidence by the EU member states’ high officials. The state looks divided in major institutional issues such as national defense, justice, and security. In this context, one should add the direct European Commission’s warning for imposing a new control mechanism over state’s judicial system and reforms (Rule of Law Framework) in order to avoid activating article 7 of the EU Treaty (suspending certain rights of an EU member state when a country is considered at risk of breaching the EU’s core values). The state

faces political abnormality in many levels which at the moment could be resolved only by early parliamentary elections. 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.



SERBIA: May 21st, the Serbian Parliament adopted an anti-corruption law and a number of financial agreements. The anti-corruption law expands the powers of the Anti-Corruption Agency which the Government claims will now become more independent. The law gives the agency the right to monitor the bank accounts of officials without their permission. It allows bans elected officials from appearing in political campaigns in their elected role. The law has been criticized by both the opposition and Transparency Serbia for not being sufficiently strict. The financial agreements adopted or approved by Parliament include contracts on loans from the Chinese Export-Import Bank to build roads and upgrade railways, a financial partnership agreement with the European Investment Bank and on loans from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and Council of Europe Development Bank. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 24th, “We know that ROSU is on standby,” the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic said

after meeting with representatives of Serbs from Kosovo in the Palace of Serbia. Vucic also said that international community should prevent arrests of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija. At a press conference, he said that he and Serbs from Kosovo have prepared “*strong measures*” as Serbia's response to Pristina's behavior but that those would wait until after a meeting in Paris. “*We have prepared measures. We will take care that they do not affect Serbs in Kosovo, so they are limited, but very strong and harsh. We will not implement them until after the meeting in Paris is over,*” Vucic said. As he added, his task in Paris will be to inform “*representatives of Europe*” Merkel and Macron about Serbia's response after nine months of “*anti-civilizational*” taxes (imposed by Pristina), Pristina's resolution on the so-called genocide, formation of an army, non-implementation of the Brussels agreement by Pristina. The President also said that “*we know that ROSU (special Kosovo Police) is ready and intends to start arresting Serbs,*” and urged the international community to prevent such developments. After his meeting with about 140 political representatives of Serbs and the most important institutions of Serbia in Kosovo, Vucic also asked representatives of the “*Quint*” - i.e., five leading western countries - who recently said they were concerned about what happened in the 2017 elections - to try to prevent provocations and actions aimed at expelling Serbs from Kosovo. “*Those who thought there would be some talks in Paris were wrong, there would be no talks until they (Pristina) abolish taxes. We can talk about how nice the weather is, but the status of Kosovo and Metohija will not be discussed until taxes have been abolished,*” he said. (www.b92.net)

- May 25th, the 25th “1 in 5 Million” protest started with the singing of the Serbian national anthem in Belgrade on Saturday, followed by speeches from several speakers. Democratic Party (Demokratska stranka - DS) official, Bransilav Lecic told the crowd that protests across the country have been called for June 8th, 2019 adding that the steps to follow would be announced at those gatherings. Lecic is a veteran of protests against the Milosevic regime and joined the “1 in 5 Million” protests from the start. Other speakers said violence is impermissible. The protest march was headed by people carrying a banner saying “No More Bloody Shirts,” a reminder of the incident that launched the protests when opposition leader Borko Stefanovic was beaten during a party gathering in the town of Krusevac. A N1 reporter said that the biggest protest next week would be staged in that town. The protesters marched Belgrade city hall chanting “Resign, Resign” and on to the Serbian state TV building for a performance of the so-called Free Serbia News and then in front of the main entrance to the Serbian Presidency building where a so-called Free Zone was set up. Protest organizers said that Saturday’s march was devoted to everyone who was physically assaulted by the authorities. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Serbia 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. According to the President Alexandar Vucic

elections will be held in 2020. It is assessed that Vucic feels more confident that fully controls political situation in Serbia and there is no need for early elections at the moment. Regarding Belgrade – Pristina dialogue there is nothing to be expected in the near future; the whole process has reached a deadlock. Taking into consideration that both sides harden their rhetoric one should not expect any progress in the new meeting in Paris scheduled for July 2019. Serbia strengthens its relations with Russia (and China) seeking stronger support regarding Kosovo case. Security situation is complex and uncertain since Serbia apart from political and diplomatic means has engaged its military and security forces. The Armed Forces are in high readiness alert but Vucic tried to de-escalate situation by stating that war is not a possible solution. However, none could predict Serbia’s reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation included) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said 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 its Armed Forces are the power of the state.



SLOVENIA: May 20th, Prime Minister, Matjan Sarec and Defense Minister,

Karl Erjavec stressed that a decision on Slovenia's potential withdrawal from the peacekeeping missions in Mali and Lebanon had not yet been taken. "No decision has been taken," Erjavec told press after Foreign Minister, Miro Cerar said last week that the Defense Ministry was considering such a move. Erjavec expressed regret that Cerar had disclosed the details of "what is a confidential procedure" and explained the Defense Ministry is "constantly monitoring all missions including the degree of risks involved." Sarec said the Government remained to deliberate on this on the basis of an expert assessment. (www.sta.si)

- May 22nd, the Left (Levica) party has tabled a motion to give the National Assembly the final say over deployment of Slovenian Armed Forces personnel in international military operations ending Government's prerogative on the matter. The current system is "opaque and undemocratic," Left's MP, Matej T. Vatovec said as he presented amendments to the defense act. The party claims the change would "create space for public debate" with MPs assuming responsibility. Defense Minister, Karl Erjavec said is working on its own legislative changes and does not support the Left's motion. (www.sta.si)

- May 24th, the Ibiza corruption scandal in Austria, proposed setting up of mixed Slovenian – Italian border patrols and populism were the main topics of the last EU election debate aired by the public broadcaster RTV Slovenija. Candidates mostly condemned corruption and populism saying that they have never been involved in corruption cases. Only candidates of List of marjan Sarec (Lista Marjana Sarca – LMS) and

Modern Centre Party (Stranka modernega centra - SMC) backed the idea of Foreign Minister, Miro Cerar for joint Police patrols on the border with Italy. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability. Although the Government is a minority one seeking compromise for survival, Sarec has been proved of being flexible in Slovenia's politics so far achieving to balance adequately between different political trends. Left party (Levica) 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. At the moment none of the ruling coalition parties wish snap elections. The May 26th, 2019 European elections may redefine balances within ruling coalition. 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 be excluded periodically. Slovenia implies that the ongoing border dispute may affect its decision regarding Croatia's membership candidacy in Schengen Zone. 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. 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: May 24th, Turkey will eliminate the People's Protection Units (YPG), from northern Syria sooner or later and not allow any terror corridor to be established that poses a threat to the country and the people of Syria, Vice President Fuat Oktay said. Elaborating on Turkey's position and expectations from the Manbij agreement and the ongoing safe zone consultations with the US, Oktay indicated that the emergence and performance of the agreement has not been satisfying for Turkey so far. *“There is no change in our position on this matter. The situation in Idlib cannot be sustainable. Joint patrols and training have started but Manbij has not been cleared of the PKK, Democratic Union Party (PYD), or the YPG yet. This terror corridor is still a threat for Turkey and the people of the region. But we have also said to our counterparts that we will take this matter into our own hands if it is necessary. No one should expect Turkey to change its position in this direction. We will eliminate these terrorists from the region sooner or later,”* Oktay continued. Pointing to the recent developments in the northwestern province of Idlib, Oktay underscored that rising tension in the region is a result of destabilization attempts of the Bashar Assad regime that aims to extend its gains. *“Increasing attacks of the regime toward Idlib clearly show that the regime has an ambition to gain ground there. We have shared our opinions and concerns with Russia on that matter. Turkey fulfills its obligations according to the Idlib*

agreement and continues to work with Russia and Iran under these terms. We are closely monitoring the situation out there,” Oktay said. Emphasizing that there are some countries from different regions that have special interests in Idlib, Oktay said that there are also coalition forces in the region. *“Along with Turkey's southern corridor you will establish a terror corridor and expect me to allow it. We will not. If this coalition assists this terror corridor's existence, we will certainly take a stance against this,”* Oktay said. (www.dailysabah.com)

- May 24th, any speculation suggesting that there is a shift in Ankara's political and military alignment is *“totally baseless,”* Assistant Secretary-General of NATO Tapan İldem said at a panel in Ankara, amid increasing US threats on Turkey's decision to procure weapons from other countries with the pretext of risking the NATO alliance. *“NATO is the organization that Turkey has been playing an important role in for the last 67 years. Turkey's political and security orientation with NATO has been remaining the same as it has been reaffirmed by numerous recent official statements,”* he said. He added that there is no way for the bloc to impose any decision against a country's will, as *“it is a sovereign nation with its own choice to take part in NATO.”* Discussions on Turkey's position in NATO have been sporadically warmed up by some political circles and lobbies in Washington as well as some specific media outlets. It generally has been prompted by frequent statements by the US administration, in which it has voiced concern over Turkey's purchase of the S-400 air defense systems from Russia and urging Ankara to abandon its agreement with Moscow.

“Eliminating risks that could harm NATO allies” is used as pretext for the demand, although the military bloc and other member states previously indicated that the S-400 acquisition is Turkey's national decision. Speaking at the meeting, Burhanettin Duran, a political science professor at Ibn Khaldun University, said that US's indifferent attitude forced Turkey to find other ways to handle serious security threats, *“However, it does not mean that Turkey seeks another alliance.”* *“Turkey sometimes criticizes the global world order and Western countries or the US role on a global scale, but comments on axis change are black propaganda,”* he said. Turkey's region abounds with ballistic missile proliferation and rogue weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs, as well as increasing terror threats by groups in northern Syria, including DAESH and the People's Protection Units (YPG), the latter being the Syrian affiliate of the PKK, a terrorist group designated as such by Turkey, the US and the EU. In due consideration of regional and global developments that pose grave risks to its national security, Turkey decided to meet its need for an air defense system from Russia and inked a 2.5 billion dollars deal with Moscow in December 2017 after the US repeatedly rejected selling Patriot missiles to Turkey. Regarding S-400 discussions Nursin Guney, a Professor of international relations from Bahcesehir Cyprus University (north occupied Cyprus), emphasized Ankara's need to protect its air space and to have deterrence against threats emanating from state and non-state actors in the fragile region. *“Both conventional and unconventional threats pointing at Turkey differentiate in quite unpredictable and dangerous security environment. On behalf of Turkey, we expect empathy from our allies,”* she

said. Turkey became a NATO member in 1952 as part of the first enlargement movement three years after the foundation of the organization. Since then, the country, which has the second largest army in the organization after the US, has provided NATO a connection to the Middle East and Black Sea through straits, has also taken part in many peacekeeping missions. (www.dailysabah.com)

- May 25th, Turkey will continue its drilling activities in the eastern Mediterranean as part of its bilateral agreement with Northern Cyprus (occupied part of Cyprus by Turkish Armed Forces), said Turkey's National Defense Minister Hulusi Akar on Saturday. Akar pointed that Ankara and Athens will continue their meetings over the issue, which he deemed as *“beneficial”* for both countries, noting that Turkey *“poses a threat to no one.”* The Defense Minister also said that Ankara opposes *“provocative acts and irresponsible statements”* over the Aegean and East Mediterranean. Turkey repeatedly said its hydrocarbon activities in the Eastern Mediterranean are based on its legitimate rights under international law. *“Our desire and expectation are that the rights and interests of Turkey - which has the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean - and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus to be respected. We expect from all the sides to respect these subjects. This is our most natural right,”* Akar said. *“Turkey, in every occasion, voices that it sides with resolution of the problems in Aegean, Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus within the framework of good neighborly relations and international law and it exerts efforts in this direction,”* Akar added. Turkey has consistently

contested the Greek Cypriot administration's unilateral drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean, saying Turkish Cypriots also have rights to the resources in the area. (www.yenisafak.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Deterioration of Turkish – US relations is a major concern for Turkey threatening its political and economic stability. Purchase of Russian air-defense system S-400 is unacceptable for the US administration threatening directly Turkey with sanctions. 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. 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. It seems that economy is the major Turkish problem which may be emerged as the “Achilles’ heel” for Erdogan and his political long reign. It cannot be excluded dramatic developments regarding Turkish economy. Besides, Turkish society looks like being fed up with autocratic practices of Erdogan and this was a key point during last local elections. Revote of municipal elections in Istanbul raises questions for the whole process and transparency of procedure. Free and fair elections are under question in Turkey taking into consideration that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and ruling AKP fully controls Justice system and

state's institutions. Scheduled for June 23rd, 2019 elections in Istanbul will be a “stress test” for Turkish democratic principles and values. However, it is proved that loss of Istanbul municipality – the biggest Turkish city and trade hub which was under AKP control last 15 years – was a “bitter defeat” for Erdogan. 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. Although Turkey maintains its strategic goal of entering the EU, the EU sends strong messages of suspending the EU – Turkey accession talks. Turkish Armed Forces declares its readiness to intervene militarily in Syria, eastern of Euphrates river but the US does not give the “green light” aiming at protecting Syrian Kurds and YPG. Turkey is reinforcing its troops in the Turkish – Syrian borders waiting for the “green light” for establishing a safe zone in Syria but it is doubtful if it will ever get it. There are thoughts of unilateral action within Syria but such a decision may bring Turkish troops against the U.S forces; an unprecedented scenario. 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 reacted eventually by sending its drillship Fatih (accompanied by three other ships) to show its presence and to claim its interests. It was an expected reaction and it is assessed that Turkey entered in the East Mediterranean geostrategic and energy rivalry showing determination by action. The cost so far, for Turkey, is zero achieving simultaneously to question Cypriot sovereign rights. International reactions (US, EU etc) has limited in a couple of “warm words of support and sympathy” to Cyprus leaving initiative of action to Turkey. In this context, Turkey strengthened its diplomatic efforts to convince international community for its fair rights in the maritime region. 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.


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NOTE

 Stable situation. No security risk

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored

 Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions

 Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk

 Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict