



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: September 4th,

speaking in the annual conference of the EU Ambassadors the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy and Security, Federica Mogherini, paid special attention to future accession negotiations of Albania and F.Y.R.O.M. *"It will be an intensive year for opening Albania's and Macedonia's [F.Y.R.O.M] accession negotiations. Allow me to be clear. This is an opportunity that must be grabbed right now. This is not a ceding from our part. It is in the interest of our European citizens, within and outside the EU. In the Balkans it is clear today that the EU is a reference point. Allow me to tell something to those who fear that other powers are more present in the region; as long as we are present in the region there will be no room for others,"* Mogherini said. (www.top-channel.tv)

- September 4th – 5th, on September 4th, 2018 Albania's Parliament reconvened after a month of recess with both opposition parties boycotting the start of the parliamentary sessions signaling renewed tensions ahead of next year's local elections. Instead, MPs of the main opposition Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë - PDSH) and its smaller ally the Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI) gathered in the northern city of Shkodra, accusing Edi Rama's Government of having links with criminal groups. DP Head Lulzim Basha accused the Government of being unable to tackle crime while noting that in three months Shkodra has witnessed 6 mafia-style murders and two kidnappings. *"Rama openly cooperated with criminal gangs in Shkodra, during the elections. He worked with the Bajraj klan and now has lost all power to impose the rule of law. It is our duty to find the ways, action*

and the political platform which will end this dire situation providing the country its security and democracy," Basha said. However, MPs of the ruling Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë - PS) accused the opposition of playing against Albania's European integration interests and of staining the country's image abroad. Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama criticized Basha's inability to mobilize a strong opposition in the country. *"When he should be in Tirana, he goes to Shkodra. When he should enter elections, he goes into a tent. When he should go to work, he goes sleeping. When he loses, he proclaims victory. We can't do anything; we have to do without him. All our attention is on people,"* wrote Rama in social media. Coming out of the Shkodra meeting, former Prime Minister and DP member Sali Berisha accused Police of being one with criminal gangs in the country and called on people to bring down the Government. The opposition has vowed to come up with a commonly agreed political platform within 10 days *"Liberating the Government from crime."* The boycott of the parliamentary session signals heightened tensions ahead of next year's local elections. The country's European integration has stalled in the past because of corruption and constant political conflicts in the Parliament, with the opposition often blocking or boycotting plenary sessions and committees. The Albanian opposition announced that will not be present at the next parliamentary session. MPs of the opposition will go to Elbasan instead, to hold a meeting about the criminality issue. (www.tiranaecho.com, www.top-channel.tv)

- September 5th, over 45 journalists from various media outlets have sought to seek political asylum or adopt the nationality of another country in order to flee threats they receive in Albania says

the Union of Albanian Journalists (UAJ). UAJ Head Aleksander Cipa said the number of journalists seeking to leave the country due to threats for performing their tasks has increased for the period 2017-2018. *“12 journalists have sought political asylum in the EU and the US because of the danger they face in their job, while 34 others have asked for nationality of other countries. Almost all of them have compiled filed of documents to prove threats in their job and are preparing to leave the country,”* said Cipa. The warning comes days after a gun attack on the parental home of an investigative journalist, Klodiana Lala, near Tirana and after a ground reporter from Report TV was threatened at gunpoint while filming a crime scene in the town of Laç in northern Albania. Mr. Cipa said that he does not think the culprits who attacked Lala’s home will ever be found, like previous cases before. Scores of journalists and civil society representatives poured into social networks with messages of solidarity. Albania enjoys an open and free media environment; however journalists exercise a high degree of auto-censorship, fearing they may disturb higher editorial policy controlled by media owners with huge business interests. The boundaries between media, politics and business have always been blurry in Albania. “Reporters Without Borders” ranked Albania 75th out of 180 nations in its latest 2018 World Press Freedom Index, a slight improvement from 2017. No media worker or journalists have been killed or kidnapped in Albania in recent years. However, a joint research project between “Reporters Without Borders” and the “Balkan Investigative Reporting Network” (BIRN) in Albania, reveals that the Albania media scene is highly concentrated in the hand of few major owners, who have strong political affiliations, and control more than half of the audience share and nearly

90% of the market share. Similarly, “Freedom House” classified Albania as “Partly Free” in its latest Freedom of the Press Report for 2017. (www.tiranaecho.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Albanian Government looks determined to strengthen its work in order to achieve its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU next year. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Vetting process is a decisive step against corruption which remains together with organized crime the most significant problems of the state. Next will be vetting process to politicians; a reform in which opposition is inexplicably against. Lately, opposition voices claiming links between the Government and Edi Rama personally with organized crime are increasing raising questions over the power of “Albanian mafia” in the country and its influence in state’s politics. Opposition inaugurated new parliamentary season by boycotting the first session as a protest for link between the Government and organized crime. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a “mother nation”. The Albanian Government implied through the Minister of Foreign Affairs that it is opposed in scenarios of territorial exchanges or border changes between Serbia and Kosovo. However, things are more complicated since the Minister stated that his country will adopt the EU’s stance in the case. Taking into consideration that the EU through the High Representative Federica Mogherini unofficially claimed it will support territory exchange if both countries stay away from efforts to create ethnic homogenous states it is obvious that the Albanian Government does not

make its stance clear. It is expected that finally Albania will follow the EU and US line. Albania maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and F.Y.R.O.M. Possible border changes may engage Albania in dangerous situations taking into consideration that it has the role of "protector" of Albanians in the region. Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA: September 3rd,

Bosnian Serb President Milorad Dodik said the announced visit of Kosovo Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli to Banja Luka for September 5th, 2018 meeting of Foreign Ministers of the South East European Cooperation Process's (SEEC) member states is not acceptable. *"Republika Srpska did not give consent for Bosnia to recognize the Kosovo so-called Minister of that false country, who cannot be welcomed in Republika Srpska,"* Dodik said. Bosnian Foreign Minister Igor Crnadak confirmed that Pacolli would be coming to Banja Luka, with the consent of Serbia. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- September 4th, according to the Federal Police Directorate (FUP) in the Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina (FB&H), there are no camps in which (para)military training is conducted. The Federal Ministry of Interior and FUP investigated the Association for the Development of Physical and Positive Characteristics "Asker" based in Sarajevo which activities have been the subject of media interest in the region. *"The aforementioned association organized a camp for its members in the complex of the Sports and Recreation Center*

Jelen, Jelah Field, Tesanj Municipality, including certain sports and excursions, but according to collected information not any kind of military training," the B&H Council of Ministers replied to the question of Mirsad Jonlagic, MP of B&H Parliamentary Assembly on the existence of terrorist camps in the country. In the same way, the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) announced that they do not have any information that there are camps for terrorists training in the territory of B&H. The Brcko District Police agreed with FUP and SIPA statements. Early this year, the Republica Srpska (RS) broadcaster (RTRS) and other media close to the RS authorities have assured the public that the "Asker" Association in Tesanj provides military training for children representing a threat to Serbs in B&H. Jonlagic requested such information from the state executive authorities, considering that the Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, and the European Parliament members Tonina Picule, Marijana Petir and others, talked about Wahhabism, radical Islam and camps for training in B&H. (www.klix.ba)

- September 4th, the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Савез независних социјалдемократа - СНСД/SNSD) and Democratic National Alliance or Democratic People's Alliance (Демократски народни савез - DNS) Deputies submitted a proposal for the dismissal of Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) Security Minister Dragan Mektic due to the escalation of the migrant crisis. However, the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of B&H removed from agenda the request of SNSD and DNS. More specifically, Deputies adopted the proposal of the Head of the Serb Democratic Party (Српска демократска странка - СДС/SDS) Aleksandra Pandurevic,

who proposed withdrawal of SNSD and DNS's request. Mektic told reporters that no one would ever stop him from fighting crime and corruption. Taking into consideration the coming elections of October 7th, 2018 he pointed out that time has come for citizens to give an end in SNSD's "Dictatorship that has started killing its own citizens and silencing journalists." Mektic launched serious accusations against Republika Srpska (RS) President Milorad Dodik "He is a common mouse. He should be brave during the war and not a smuggler of oil and cigarettes. He is only brave enough to sling mud at everybody," concluded Mektic. Considering that election campaign has started in B&H and that this session of the House of Representatives is probably the last one, it is certain that Mektic will not be removed from his office. According to Serb Deputies Mektic's proposal for dismissal from his duties is just a chapter in the ongoing struggle between political parties of RS. (www.klix.ba)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. General elections have been scheduled for October 7th, 2018 and it is assessed that nationalistic rhetoric will be increased for pre-electoral reasons. Security Minister announced that he has reliable information for tension and turmoil in RS during the elections setting an alarm for security situation of the state. The state's road towards its Euro-atlantic integration is full of obstacles and opening of negotiation talks with the EU should not be expected earlier than 2022. RS rhetoric for greater autonomy remains active and the current debate on border change and territorial exchanges between Serbia

and Kosovo developed Serbian entity's "taste" for its case. More and more "voices" express concern over Russian influence in the Serbian entity not excluding security irregularities. Bosnia has become a field of influence's rivalry; Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Russia approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests. Major concerns over security situation and political stability in the state.



BULGARIA: September 4th, after a coalition council meeting the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (Национален фронт за спасение на България - NFSB), one of three minor nationalist parties in the ruling coalition in Bulgaria, said it will remain part of the administration led by the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (ГЕРБ, Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) for now. The small nationalist party had threatened to quit the Government of the Prime Minister Boyko Borissov if it does not change the way it takes key decisions. The crisis broke out after the leader of NFSB Valeri Simeonov, criticized the way in which Borissov dismissed three Ministers last week. Borissov called for the resignations of the Ministers from his own GERB party to ease public discontent over a coach crash the week before that claimed lives of 17 people and left 21 more injured. Interior Minister Valentin Radev, Transport Minister Ivailo Moskovski and Regional Minister Nikolay Nankov complied immediately, saying they felt obliged to take political responsibility for the tragedy. Parliament has still to cast the final vote on their resignations. However, Simeonov said they were not resignations but dismissals, alluding to the three recent resignations but also to nine other

dismissals of Ministers, Vice-Ministers and senior civil servants in the past year. The party's leadership gathered for a two-day summit during which it discussed whether it will continue backing the coalition Government. A NFSB declaration on September 3rd, 2018 announced that its 9 MPs would vote against the resignations of the GERB Ministers in the National Assembly on September 5th, 2018. The declaration also criticized the *“Unilateral style with which Borissov manages his cadres,”* adding that the *“Illogical changes of Ministers, Vice-Ministers and other members of the state administration creates professional deficiencies and undermines fulfillment of the Government program.”* Simeonov also suggested removing Tourism Minister Nikolina Angelkova, with who he has clashed in the past. But after the coalition council meeting that lasted until late on September 4th, 2018 tension between the NFSB and the other governing parties seemed to have eased. NFSB has formed a coalition with two other nationalist parties; the Attack (Атака) and Bulgarian National Movement (Българско Национално Движение – VMRO) under the name United Patriots. The three nationalist parties in the ruling coalition have been entangled in an internal struggle for months. While the NFSB often criticizes the Government, the Attack leader Volen Siderov unconditionally backs the Prime Minister, and VMRO leader and Defense Minister Krasimir Karakachanov acts as a mediator. After the meeting Siderov altered his rhetoric: *“What is more important is to remain in Government and not throw the country into chaos, or to fall apart and not know what will follow? We decided that the latter is worse for the country.”* (www.balkaninsight.com)

- September 4th, leader of the opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (Българска социалистическа партия - BSP) Kornelia Ninova said during the opening of the new session of the National Assembly after the summer recess that most of her parliamentary group were leaving Parliament to *“go to the people”* while 20 MPs would remain to defend party's positions. In Bulgaria's 240-seat National Assembly, the BSP has 79 MPs. *“We want dissolution of Parliament and early elections,”* Ninova said. BSP leader tried to highlight serious social tensions, with a Government crisis and instability in the ruling majority. Ninova commended the Trade Register collapse blocking the whole economic life in the country while state institutions had been helpless to react. On the other hand, according to Ninova about 250,000 people had been *“cheated by an insurer licensed by the Government,”* referring to the Olympic insurance company's going out of business. Finally, she said, 17 people had died *“because of corruption and theft...,”* referring to the August 25th, 2018 Svoje bus crash. The tragedy had created a lot of tension, Ninova said, adding that it also had emerged that foreign direct investment has fallen tenfold. A new gas price increase was due on October 1st, 2018, which would affect the price of many goods, she said. She said that in the coming days, Bulgaria would see a battle between the Prime Minister and Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (ГЕРБ, Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) leader Boiko Borissov and GERB parliamentary leader Tsvetan Tsvetanov. On August 31st, 2018 three Cabinet Ministers, all from GERB, submitted their resignations on Borissov request because of the Svoje crash. On September 4th, 2018 Tsvetanov said in a television interview that

the National Assembly could vote not to accept these resignations. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- September 5th, Bulgaria would abstain for the time being from joining the European Intervention Initiative, the country's Defense Minister Krassimir Karakachanov told Parliament during Question Time. Asked by opposition socialist MP Petar Vitanov whether the Defense Ministry believes that it is in Bulgaria's interest to join the initiative, Karakachanov said that it is still too vague. *"The European Intervention Initiative is still only a political forum, where ideas are being discussed. It is yet to develop and acquire more concrete dimensions,"* he said. Bulgaria's active participating in EU's Common Security and Defense Policy is of strategic importance to national security, Karakachanov said. However, he underlined taking on additional commitments like the European Intervention Initiative could endanger existing strategic goals because of the need to redirect already scarce financial resources earmarked for defense purposes. In June 2018, 9 EU member states agreed to form a joint European military intervention force. Its goal, as outlined by the French President Emmanuel Macron would be to be able to rapidly deploy troops in crisis scenarios near EU's borders. The initiative was initially backed by the Defense Ministers of France, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Estonia, Spain, Portugal and the UK. Last week, Finland announced its intention to join the project while Italy expressed its initial support towards the effort although it did not sign the initial declaration. The European Intervention Initiative is separate of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Bulgaria joined PESCO alongside 22 other EU member states. PESCO's goal is to enable joint development of defense

capabilities, investment in shared projects and enhancement of the operational readiness of their Armed Forces. It is also separate from NATO, although all 9 countries which signed up to the original letter of intention are part of NATO. Finland was the first of six EU member states that are not part of the alliance (alongside Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Malta and Sweden) to show interest in joining the initiative. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

It seems that the sudden Government crisis has been overcome since the ruling coalition partner the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria decided to remain within the Government. However, the long struggle between the three minor parties which back the Government maintains scenarios of snap elections. Opposition BSP tries to take in advantage of governmental crisis by strengthening its rhetoric against Borisov. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Bulgaria presents an active development policy trying to exploit its resources and establish an attractive and stable investment environment. However, collapse of state's Company Register (and insolvency of the fourth largest insurer, Olympic) sets alarming signs for Bulgaria's functioning as a modern EU state (aiming at entering the eurozone). President Radev strengthens his rhetoric and criticism against the Government and the Prime Minister Borissov highlighting their different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Although modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority

for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc) military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: September 3rd, the Croatian Navy missile boat VUKOVAR sailed out from the southern naval port of Lora in the Croatian city of Split to join NATO's Operation "SEA GUARDIAN" in the Mediterranean Sea. The VUKOVAR, with its Commander and 32 crew members, will join in the maritime security operation from September 5th to September 21st, 2018. It is the first Croatian vessel to join this mission. Operation "SEA GUARDIAN", launched in November 2016, aiming at reinforcing maritime situational awareness and counter-terrorism efforts through hailing and boarding suspect vessels and capacity building in the Mediterranean Sea. It focuses on collecting information about maritime activities in the region to help identify possible security risks and develop maritime security awareness. The VUKOVAR will carry out non-combat tasks, including maintaining maritime situational awareness, deterring security threats and providing support to NATO's strategic communications. "We are aware that the security of NATO and Croatia is defended not only on Croatian borders but also in places where threats emerge," Defense Minister Damir Krsticevic said at a send-off ceremony, adding that no country could address contemporary security challenges on its own. Chief of Staff of the Croatian Armed Forces General Mirko Sundov said that by participating in this operation Croatia will once again show that it is always ready to improve

relations and cooperation with its partners and neighbors. Operation comes under the operational command of the Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM) in Northwood, United Kingdom. (www.hr.n1info.com)



VUKOVAR missile boat

(Photo source: www.morh.hr)

- September 5th, a meeting of ruling coalition partners was held with most of the parties assuring reporters that the ruling majority is still stable. The centre-right Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica - HDZ) political secretary, Lovro Kuscevic, said that the coalition is stable and that he does not see any reason for concern. "We have a stable majority in the Parliament, that's important for the Government to continue with projects that have been launched and that are yet to be launched. I believe the majority will stay stable until next regular parliamentary election," said Kuscevic. However, he did not miss to add that the HDZ is also prepared for possible early elections, should they happen anyway. Ivan Vrdoljak, the leader of the Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats (Hrvatska Narodna Stranka – Liberalni Demokrati - HNS – LD), which is a junior partner in the coalition Government, said that there is no need for an early election and that the HNS would not be the one to cause them. The HNS is nonetheless prepared for such a scenario, it has

recently set up an election team and is discussing candidates to run in different constituencies, he said. Radimir Cacic, leader of the People's Party – Reformists (Narodna stranka–Reformisti), told reporters that they were wrong to count the members of the Parliament who support the Government, and should be counting those who do not support it. The leader of the regional Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja (Hrvatski Demokratski Savez Slavonije i Baranje - HDSSB) party, Branimir Glavas, said briefly that the Parliament majority is just as strong today as it had been before the summer recess. Leader of the conservative Croatian Christian Democratic Party (Hrvatska demokršćanska stranka - HDS), Branko Hrg, said that it would be good to “*beef up the parliamentary majority*” but he would not speculate on how that could be done. However, Boris Milosevic, an MP from the Independent Democratic Serb Party (Samostalna Demokratska Srpska Stranka - SDSS), gave another controversial response by saying that “*There will be elections but when they would be held must be seen.*” Asked if he was implying that the ruling majority would fall apart, Milosevic said that he is not “*implying anything*” but just wanted to say that “*elections may be held tomorrow or in two years' time.*” (www.hr.n1info.com)

- September 6th, the Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic met with the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, in Zagreb, saying after the meeting that Croatia sees Azerbaijan as a strategic partner and supports improving bilateral relations in economy, energy and security cooperation. “*Croatia sees Azerbaijan as a strategic partner, in accordance with the Declaration on Strategic Partnership signed in 2013. Croatia will remain a true friend of*

Azerbaijan within the EU, and it supports Azerbaijan's decision to develop its relations with the European Union,” Grabar-Kitarovic said after talks with Aliyev. Their meeting focused on the countries’ “*Great cooperation in energy, economy, culture, science, technology, and education.*” She also announced that Croatia has decided to open an embassy in Baku, in order to step up bilateral cooperation. Azerbaijan opened its embassy in Zagreb in 2011. Azerbaijan seeks to improve trade with Croatia, and that is why the Joint Economic Commission should continue to do a serious job Aliyev said. Azerbaijan’s President said his country implements large energy projects which will enable the delivery of large amounts of natural gas to European countries. “*Over the next two years, Azerbaijan will be ready to deliver natural gas to European markets which will be an important contribution to European energy security,*” Aliyev said adding that cooperation with Croatia is very important in that context. Grabar-Kitarovic said that Croatia, as one of future European gas hubs, is interested in energy cooperation. “*Croatia wants to become a gas supplier for central Europe, through an Adriatic-Ionian Gas Pipeline (IAP),*” she said. In 2016, Croatia, Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Montenegro as well as the executives of Azerbaijan's SOCAR oil and gas company signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the construction of the future Ionian-Adriatic gas pipeline. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

It is estimated that political distance between the President and Government may affect political stability of the state. Ruling coalition claims political stability. Border dispute on Piran Bay

remains active and Slovenia's initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. It is still a question how Croatia will react. Apart from that a new border conflict is emerged with Bosnia & Herzegovina regarding Peljesak Bridge. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: September 3rd, the state has lost some 12 million Euros in tax revenue in the first seven months of the year, as more and more Greek Cypriot motorists opt to fill their tanks in the north occupied Cyprus, the consumer association announced. During the same period, petrol stations lost close to 1 million Euros in commission. Taking into account total sales in 2016 and 2017, the association concluded that in the first seven months of the year, people bought around 8.8 million liters of 95 petrol and 8.7 million liters of diesel from the north, or 3.71% and 4.34% respectively of the sales in Cyprus. It also represents 11 % of sales in the north. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- September 6th, the annual inflation rate rose in August 2018 to 2.5%; the highest in seven years from 2.3% the previous month, once more exposing Cyprus's vulnerability to energy price hikes. In the first eight months, the consumer price index rose an annual 0.9%, the statistical service announced. In August, the largest impact on inflation resulted from a 13% increase in fuel prices followed by a 7.9% increase in the price of fruit and vegetables, CYSTAT said. The third largest direct impact on inflation came from a

13% increase in electricity prices. The overall increase in prices last month was partly offset by a 0.7% drop in the prices of industrial products and a 2.8% reduction in the price of water, CYSTAT said. Cyprus, whose public transit system remains undeveloped and its inhabitants rely on the use of cars to move around, has repeatedly failed in the past decade to introduce natural gas to substitute the use of crude oil and diesel as fuel for its conventional power plants. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- September 7th, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said both Cyprus and France and their Presidents want the two countries' cooperation on defense issues to be further developed. In statements after talks with his Cypriot counterpart, Nicos Christodoulides, Le Drian said that cooperation among the two countries on defense is excellent and is based on trust, adding that French warships dock at Cyprus ports for supply. Le Drian expressed his country's support to efforts for a Cyprus settlement in line with the EU *acquis communautaire*, and based on relevant UN Security Council resolutions. He said France wants to see a resumption of Cyprus negotiations, taking into consideration what has been achieved during previous rounds of talks. "*France is ready to help,*" he added. Christodoulides said that during their talks, the Ministers reaffirmed bilateral interests and discussed further expanding ties. The Ministers of Energy and Defense, Yiorgos Lakkotrypis and Savvas Angelides, also participated for part of the meeting at the Foreign Ministry. Le Drian said that Cyprus and France had established a firm cooperation in the field of energy, noting their commitment for stability in the region, which he said is based on respect of international law. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus expresses in highest level its commitment to react decisively against possible Turkish provocations regarding its intentions to exploit energy resources in Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). It is estimated that coming autumn may be a period of high tension while a “hot” security incident should not be excluded. Cyprus promotes drills in its EEZ while Turkey is ready to react if it assesses that its EEZ (or the Turkish Cypriot EEZ) is violated it by the Cypriots. Peace talks may start soon again while the new UN envoy continues its active efforts aiming at restarting talks. The U.S – Turkey tension may affect directly Cyprus in the fields of defense and security. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security.



F.Y.R.O.M: September 6th – 9th, state and international organizations’ leaders visited Skopje one after another to express their support to the name agreement between Greece and F.Y.R.O.M and to push for a successful referendum. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg wrapped up a two-day visit to Skopje on September 5th, 2018 which focused on the country’s path toward NATO membership. At the Brussels Summit in July, Allied leaders decided to invite the Government in Skopje to begin accession talks with the Alliance, which have now begun. The visit – the Secretary General’s second to the capital this year – marked an opportunity to highlight the benefits of NATO accession, as well as progress in the reforms undertaken by F.Y.R.O.M. It was also an opportunity for the

authorities to brief the Secretary General on their preparations for the upcoming referendum on the name agreement with Greece. Speaking alongside the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, Stoltenberg said “NATO’s door is open, but only people of this country can decide to walk through it. So your future is in your hands.” He underlined that there would be “no way” for the country to join NATO without implementing the name agreement, calling it an “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity. Stoltenberg had a working dinner with Zaev and members of his cabinet. The Secretary General met with President Gjorge Ivanov, as well as the President of the Parliament, Talat Xhaferi, and the Leader of the Opposition Hristijan Mickoski. He also met with the new Committee for NATO Integration, which includes Prime Minister Zaev, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Radmila Sekerinska, Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov, and other Ministers and senior officials. On September 6th, 2018 the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg Jean Asselborn, visited F.Y.R.O.M where he met Zaev, Dimitrov, and Vice Premier for European Affairs Bujar Osmani. “We are waiting for you in the EU and NATO,” Asselborn said to the Prime Minister. Sending a message to F.Y.R.O.M’s people Asselborn said that the country is on the right track to secure its integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. To this end, a successful outcome of the referendum is needed. On September 8th, 2018 the German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Skopje to add her voice to calls that the Balkans nation renames itself as “North Macedonia.” Merkel made the first ever official visit by a German chancellor to F.Y.R.O.M describing its September 30th, 2018 referendum as a potential stabilization move of “great interest” to Germany and the EU. Merkel, who was welcomed to Skopje with military honors by the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, met

also with opposition leader Hristijan Mickovski of the conservative party Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE). The same day, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz visited the country calling F.Y.R.O.M's citizens to embrace the new name. Kurz, visiting Skopje urged people to vote for the name change, saying the EU would not be whole until Western Balkan countries, Serbia and F.Y.R.O.M included, joined it. (www.mia.mk, www.dw.com, www.nato.int)

- September 7th, F.Y.R.O.M Prime Minister Zoran Zaev at the joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, stressed that Stoltenberg had personally signed NATO's invitation for the country on July 12th, 2018. *"The Government pressed ahead with a series of activities for NATO accession. We set up a committee that I am chairing. We are drawing up a plan on the implementation of reforms in line with NATO standards, with a main emphasis on rule of law, security services, fight against corruption,"* Zaev told the media. He underlined the importance of the upcoming referendum, branding it a significant challenge for the country. Zaev appears confident in the successful outcome of the September 30th, 2018 referendum. *"My optimism surges as historic day – September 30 – is approaching. I don't think about 'what if...' as I am very much confident of the voter turnout target. There is no dilemma that voter turnout will be high,"* he said. He called on opposition to join the process. *"EU and NATO are priorities. The 'yes' campaign is based on transparency and impartiality aiming at informing citizens about the benefits as a member of the EU and NATO. A*

successful referendum is needed to proceed with constitutional changes, and sign the NATO accession protocol in early 2019." Opinion polls are encouraging, the citizens want our country become a member of NATO and EU. Around 75% support the referendum, Zaev said. Asked to tell if he deems that Russia is trying to hinder F.Y.R.O.M's NATO entry, Zaev said the utmost objective is to build friendship with all, including Russia. The Prime Minister expressed his personal gratitude to NATO Secretary General on his support. *"I hardly wait to see Macedonia [F.Y.R.O.M] as member of the Alliance,"* he said. (www.mia.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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

destabilization is not an unlikely scenario but Zaev demonstrates political intelligence and flexibility in order to avoid it.



GREECE: September 4th, the Government Council for Foreign Affairs and Defense (KYSEA) has extended the tenure of the Chief of the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (HNDGS), Admiral Evangelos Apostolakis, a statement by the Greek Prime Minister's office said. Apostolakis, who first assumed office in September 2015, will serve for a fourth consecutive year. Apostolakis, who first assumed office in September 2015, will serve for a fourth consecutive year. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- September 5th, the U.S is interested in increasing its use of military bases and ports in Greece, the Chairman of the U.S Joint Chiefs of Staff said on the second day of his official visit to Greece. *"If you look at geography, and you look at current operations in Libya, and you look at current operations in Syria, you look at potential other operations in the eastern Mediterranean, the geography of Greece and the opportunities here are pretty significant,"* General Joseph Dunford said. Dunford was speaking during a visit to the Ministry of Defense in Athens during which he met with the Chief of the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (HNDGS), Admiral Evangelos Apostolakis, whose tenure was renewed. No specific bases have as of yet been identified, according to the report, however, several options are being evaluated by General Curtis Scaparrotti, Head of the U.S European Command and NATO's Supreme Allied Commander. *"Those are discussions that General Scaparrotti and others are having right now, as they look around the region in terms of where*

they want to put forces within the next five to ten years," an unofficial source said. The U.S is keen to boost trade and military cooperation with Greece as tension with Turkey lingers over a series of regional and political disputes. Meanwhile, Greece's relations with Turkey and Russia are strained. According to the report, Dunford said that American interest in Greek bases was not related to the U.S - Turkey standoff, adding he expected that the U.S would continue to make use of Incirlik air force base in southern Turkey. *"The military-to-military relationship between the U.S and Greece is stronger than ever and is a testament to the strategic partnership we have forged over many years as close NATO allies and friends who share democratic values and strong cultural ties,"* Dunford said. *"Greece continues to be a pillar of stability and security in the region, providing key leadership on a multitude of security challenges, to include counterterrorism and maritime security. We are very thankful to the Greek people for their strong support in hosting U.S military forces in locations such as Naval Support Activity Souda Bay and look forward to working with the Greek military to explore ways to expand our bilateral security cooperation,"* concluded Dunford. (www.ekathimerini.com)



Meeting of Admiral Evangelos Apostolakis with
General Joseph Dunford

(Photo source: www.geetha.mil.gr)

- September 8th, the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras announced his plans to lower the Value Added Tax (VAT) and the property levy “ENFIA” as of 2021 and 2019 respectively in a speech at the 2018 Thessaloniki International Fair, aimed at signaling a new era for Greece after the end of the third bailout. “Greece today is a different country. A country that, after a clean exit from the memorandums, is standing on its feet again, relies on its own strengths and can look forward to the future with confidence,” he told attendees. “We are determined to fulfill the agreed fiscal targets in the coming years. We will not allow Greece to return to the era of deficits and fiscal derailment.” Presenting the Government’s political strategy for the next four years, he said it includes a reduction of the higher VAT from 24% to 22% and the lower from 13% to 12%, that will take effect as of January 2021. The Government will also pass law by the end of the year gradually reducing the property levy ENFIA by up to 50% for lower-income households. The measure will be completed in two phases: the first in January 2019 and the second in January 2020. Tsipras also pledged to lower the social security contributions for the self-employed and farmers by up to 35% as of next year. By exceeding its target for a primary surplus, the Government believes it has the opportunity to strengthen the three pillars which it considers as the main priorities for the post-bailout period: fair growth, the welfare state and boosting employment. Commenting on the much-contested planned pension cuts that the Government hopes to avoid implementing in January 2019, the Prime Minister said he is “certain” the target for a 3.5% primary surplus can be achieved without slashing pensions further. He said the Government will wait for the statistics data to verify the surplus and then it will present its point to the country’s European partners when

Greece submits its 2019 budget in October 2018. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling coalition of SYRIZA – ANEL intensifies its efforts to reverse political atmosphere after the devastating wildfires in Attica socked Greek society. In this context, the Prime Minister Tsipras announced a package of social care inaugurating a long pre-electoral campaign. Rumors for snap elections in October – November 2018 are strengthened day by day taking into consideration two facts; ANEL stance when Greece – F.Y.R.O.M name agreement would come to the Parliament for ratification namely during autumn 2018 (or beginning of 2019) and a new pension cut which has been approved by the Parliament. The ruling coalition will not go to elections after a “painful” pensions cut which is very possible to happen on January 1st, 2019. Although Tsipras and his officials say that election will be held in autumn 2019 there are thoughts that snap elections may be announced autumn 2018 or spring of 2019. Early elections together with the local and European one scheduled for May 2019 is also a possible scenario. The U.S plan an advanced role for Greece as having a “key” role in Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Greece – Turkey under “low level” tension with a lot of open issues which easily may turn into major crisis.



KOSOVO: September 4th, Kosovo Parliament discussed in an urgent session the Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj’s draft-proposal on appointing a new “unity” team in dialogue with Serbia. Haradinaj proposed his Deputy Fatmir Limaj to lead the dialogue with

Serbia. Opposition boycotted the session who also proposed a resolution asking future negotiators in dialogue with Serbia not to negotiate Kosovo borders. The initiative came in a bid to limit President Hashim Thaci's power who recently proposed land swap idea, which was strongly opposed by Haradinaj and opposition parties. Presenting the Unity Team before MPs, Haradinaj said that the team will be composed of his Deputies and in addition to Fatmir Limaj who will head the delegation other members of the Team are Enver Hoxhaj, Behgjet Pacolli, Dardan Gashi, Avni Arifi and Mahir Jakcilar. Haradinaj said that in this team they have reserved places also for opposition parties and civil society. But opposition parties have boycotted the session saying that the so-called "Unity" Team is a move to justify Thaci's leading role in dialogue with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. They also blamed the Government for proposing the extraordinary session the same day MPs were expected to vote a resolution sponsored by opposition parties aimed at sanctioning Kosovo negotiators from discussing change of borders during the dialogue with Serbia. The opposition parties of Democratic League of Kosovo, (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK), Self-Determination (Vetevendosje), and Social Democratic Party, (Partia Socialdemokrate e Kosovës – PSD) last week initiated holding an extraordinary session of Parliament to discuss Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. However, the session of Parliament has collapsed after opposition parties boycotted the session. The Speaker of Kosovo Parliament, Kadri Veseli, told media that the session has been postponed at the request of the Prime Minister Haradinaj and will resume on September 5th, 2018. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- September 5th, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci considers the only way to solve problems between Kosovo and Serbia is his idea on exchange of territories, or as he refers "*correction of borders.*" Attending a debate organized by the Kosovo Democratic Institute, Thaci said this process will mark the end of a long conflict between the two countries. But Thaci says that there will be no partition of the north inhabited mainly by Serbs during this process. "*Mutual recognition can be followed with an accord on delineation of border between Kosovo and Serbia. But I want to emphasize that there will be no partition of the northern part,*" Thaci said. He also said that Kosovo will never discuss with Serbia on the Gazivoda Lake or the north of the country. "*This process will mark the end of a long conflict between Kosovo and Serbia, and not as some say incite new conflicts. The end of conflict means setting clearly the border between the two countries,*" Thaci said. Thaci will meet his Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vucic on 7 September 7th, 2018 as part of the EU-facilitated dialogue in Brussels, when he is expected to present his idea on exchange of territories. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- September 9th, "*I am very happy to be here, I feel great,*" said the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic after he kicked-off his two-day visit to northern part of Kosovo. However, his visit was banned from visiting the Drenica region. Kosovo Albanians have blocked roads and burned tires on the announced route of the Serbian President, as he travels to visit Serbia's former province. The Kosovo Government cancelled the planned visit of the Serbian President to the Kosovo village of Banje due to "*security reasons.*" The decision came after 200 Kosovo war veterans who opposed Vucic's visit to the village with Serbian majority

of population put up barricades at the entrance of the village. As his first reaction to the road blockade, Vucic said that things must be resolved with “words and intelligence, not with arms and weapons.” The Serbian President blamed Pristina’s authorities for the failed visit and criticized KFOR for not providing a helicopter allowing him to visit the Serb inhabited village in the Drenica region. KFOR reacted in Vucic claims by saying that concerning the protest along the road to Baje it is in close contact with Kosovo Police in order to remove the blocks and to restore the freedom of movement. “KFOR is working to do it peacefully, but it is ready to intervene in accordance with its mandate, as 3rd responder, if required,” it is stated in a press release. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo – Serbia negotiations enters in a critical phase. Border exchange is on the table and what were just unofficial leaks a few days earlier becomes more official through President Thaci statements. However, Kosovo political forces reject Thaci’s negotiations on territorial issues. It seems that the U.S (and the EU) factor has a leading role in the background pushing for such a solution. Presevo Valley with a significant Albanian minority goes to Kosovo and Northern Kosovo with Serb majority will become Serbian territory. Thaci tries to reassure his citizens that he will not negotiate partition of north; but if not then what? Postponement of September 7th, 2018 meeting between Thaci and Vucic gives more time to the first for national coordination. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. A

mutual accepted agreement between Kosovo and Serbia is the critical point for the country in order to start approaching the Euro-Atlantic integration. Kosovo army issue is a case which may cause tension with Serbia and it seems that the state seeks to accelerate actions towards transformation of KSF into a regular army. It is assessed that international community namely the EU and NATO will not allow such development at least as long as both countries are willing to talk for an agreement.



MOLDOVA: September 5th, the Cabinet of Ministers has approved today the decision on the signing of the Supplementary Agreement between the Moldovan Ministry of Defense and the Armed Forces General Staff of Turkey on cooperation in the field of military training. Currently, the legal framework for cooperation in the field of military training between the two Armed Forces includes the Agreement between the Ministry of Defense of Moldova and the Armed Forces General Staff of Turkey on cooperation in the military training, technical and scientific field concluded at Ankara on November 19th, 1998, and an additional agreement signed in August 2001. On the proposal of Turkey, it was initiated drafting a new Agreement on cooperation in the field of military training. The purpose of the new document is clearer and more multidimensional regulating the process of organizing and conducting training in the military education institutions of both parties. The new document includes the scope and goal of the Agreement, wider cooperation areas, cooperation procedures, training terms, more detailed regulations on protection of secret information, regulation of special issues (applicability of provisions of Armed Conflict

Agreement, riots social and international crisis), resolution of disputes. It also regulates issues related to staff training in military academies and military mapping schools, mutual exchange of students and teachers between educational institutions, participation in joint military exercises. Finally, it is referred to cooperation on training in logistics, military medicine and healthcare, exchange of information on military judicial processes. (www.moldpres.md)

- September 6th, Moldovan and Turkish intelligence services detained six Turkish nationals working for a private chain of high schools in Moldova that is linked to exiled Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen. According to Turkish pro-Government media the Turkish Intelligence Service (MIT) had participated in the detaining of six Turkish nationals in Moldova and had taken them into an unknown place. All six were teachers or students at the Horizont Turkish high-school private chain, which is seen as close to the exiled Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen. One was only 14 years old, but he was shortly released. *“They were taken this morning, but my son and his professor were released. But another professor was taken after they broke down his door,”* the father of the teen said. He added that he feared that the others would be sent to Turkey on the first flight from Chisinau. The detainees were named as Riza Dogan, Director of the Durlesti Branch of the Horizont school network, Hasan Karacaoglu, Deputy General Manager, Yasin Ozdil, responsible for public relations at the same school, Ahmet Bilgi, Director of Ciocana Branch of the school chain and Feridon Tufekci, Director of the Ceadir-Lunga Branch of the network. Moldova's Secret Service (SIS) stated that it had conducted an operation designed to prevent threats to national security in several

locations. The actions were carried out by the SIS Antiterrorist Center. On March 31st, 2018 Turgay Sen, a Turkish national and Director of the Horizont high-school private chain was detained without explanation by the SIS. Sen was accused of financing terrorism and banned from leaving the country for 10 days, until April 10th, 2018. He was released after he filled in a request for political asylum in Moldova to avoid extradition or rendition to Turkey. Less than two weeks before Sen's arrest, Moldovan President Igor Dodon announced that he had met his Turkish counterpart Recep Erdogan at Istanbul airport on March 18th, 2018 and had talked about Turkey repairing the Presidency building in Chisinau, which was damaged in the street riots on April 7th, 2009, which toppled the then Communist-led Government. There are five Horizont high schools in Moldova. The educational institution opened in 1993. They host 1,691 pupils and employ about 376 staff from Moldova, Turkey and Albania. (www.balkaninsight.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political life is “hostage” of the pro-Russian President Igor Dodon and pro-Western Government rivalry which undermines the institutional function of the country. In the wider framework Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. Political situation in the country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which will strengthen state's transparency, accountability and democratic values. Invalidation of local elections in Chisinau by the Constitutional Court badly affected state's profile and mainly relations with the EU. Moreover, the Government is sliding into

dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime. The U.S, EU and IMF express their major concerns. By autumn the state will enter in pre-election period although elections are scheduled for February 24th, 2019. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: September 3rd, the Democratic Front (Демократски фронт) and the Serbian National Council, which represent the Serbian community in Montenegro, announced they would launch a petition to annul Montenegro's decision to recognize Kosovo's independence. *“At least 85% of Montenegrin citizens do not support the false recognition of the state of Kosovo,”* said a press release from the Democratic People's Party (Демократска народна партија – DNP), one of the members of the Montenegro's largest opposition group, the Democratic Front, whose members visited mainly Serbian-populated town of North Mitrovica in Kosovo during the weekend. Collection of signatures will start this week, the party added. Montenegro recognized Kosovo's independence in 2008, much to the anger of Serbia and of the large Serbian community in Montenegro. This is not first time the Montenegrin opposition has called for the withdrawal of Kosovo's recognition. In May 2017, the leader of the pro-Russian Democratic Front, Nebojsa Medojevic, called on the Government to protect the border with Kosovo and withdraw recognition of Kosovo's independence - after Kosovo again delayed a vote in its parliament on the vexed frontier demarcation deal. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- September 5th, in three months time, the Government of Montenegro increased the state debt by 440 million Euros, and in the end of June it amounted to 3.105 billion Euros. “It's 70.1 % of GDP. With deposits included, the debt amounted to 2.76 billion Euros which makes 62.3% of GDP”, says the Report of the Ministry of Finance. Debt of the Government led by Dusko Markovic increased by 440 million Euros. Internal debt decreased by 9 million Euros. At the end of 2006, public debt of Montenegro amounted to 700 million Euros. (www.cdm.me)

- September 9th, on September 10th, 2018 Montenegro's Air Force will get two new multi-purpose helicopters Bell 412 EPI. According to the Government of Montenegro, this will complete the demanding process of procurement of three helicopters that, with their outstanding performance, will significantly improve the capacities not only of the Air Forces, but of the complete defense system of Montenegro as well. *“The contract for the purchase of three helicopters, worth about 30 million Euros, had been signed on January 30th, 2018 and the first helicopter was shipped on April 13th, 2018,”* the Government reported. These helicopters are designed for the transport of passengers, Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC) operations, Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, cargo transfer, fire extinguishing and border controls. The delivered version of helicopters has 13 seats. They are to come to the country from Prague, where they were put together in the Bell Center for Europe after being shipped from the US. Commander of the Air Force of the Armed Forces of Montenegro, Lieutenant Colonel Nenad Pavlovic, and Major Darko Pavlovic, will be running new helicopters on their way to Montenegro. The Prime Minister Dusko Markovic and Defense

Minister Predrag Boskovic, as well as representatives of the Bell company and other officials, will be attending the ceremony organized to mark this occasion in the Golubovci Airport. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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



ROMANIA: September 3rd,

opposition parties People's Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP) and the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) plan to file a new no-confidence motion against the Government led by the Prime Minister Viorica Dancila. PMP President Eugen Tomac announced that his party plans to file a no-confidence motion against the Government, due to the violent incidents at the street protest in Bucharest on August 10th, 2018 and the spread of the African swine fever. *"These are two strong reasons for preparing this document, which we will send to all opposition MPs, but also to the rest of MPs, asking for support of all those who believe that we need to be united,"* Tomac said. His announcement came the day after PNL leader

Ludovic Orban also announced that his party prepares a no-confidence motion against the Dancila cabinet. *"We will prepare the motion very carefully. In this sense, we decided to form a larger team of negotiations, we decided to intensify dialogue with all groups, to convince them that Dancila must leave,"* Orban said. However, Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, the president of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE), the junior coalition partner of the social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), said he does not believe that this no-confidence motion will pass the Parliament vote. Opposition parties previously filed a no-confidence motion against the Government in June 2018 but the Government survived after only 166 MPs voted in favor. The motion needed 233 votes to pass. The result was predictable as the PSD-ALDE ruling coalition's MPs did not took part in the vote and neither did the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR) MPs. (www.romania-insider.com)

- September 6th, according to the European Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources Gunther Oettinger the European project is in "mortal danger" from opponents inside and outside the EU, naming Romania among the countries that threatens the EU. *"In my view, the project is in mortal danger. Some within Europe want to weaken it or even destroy it; Poland, Hungary, Romania, the Government of Italy,"* he said. Oettinger also said the Government of Germany, is not showing enough enthusiasm for the EU, particularly when it comes to the budget. However, he believes that a swift approval of the EU's next long-term budget by national leaders and the European Parliament would show Europe

remains capable of action in the face of such challenges. (www.romania-insider.com)

- September 7st, the European Parliament has decided to organize a debate on the situation in Romania in a plenary session at the beginning of October 2018. Debate will focus on the legislation changes targeting the justice system and the violent incidents during the August 10th, 2018 protest. The decision was made during a meeting of the party leaders in the European Parliament at the proposal of the Greens. Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dancila may also participate to this session to present the Romanian Government's position. The European Parliament also had a plenary session dedicated to Romania in February 2018, when the MEPs discussed the reform of the Romanian justice system and the threat it may pose to the rule of law in the country. The Romanian PM did not attend that session in which several MEPs criticized Romania's proposed justice reform. Romanian president Klaus Iohannis will address the European Parliament at the end of October 2018 with a speech about the state of the Union, which all EU leaders hold by rotation. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government continues in the field of Justice. The EU through several channels expresses its concerns over political situation in Romania hardening its rhetoric. The Venice Commission expressed its concerns over independence of state's judiciary taking into consideration the promoted amendments on judicial legislation. Iohannis strongly opposes in Government's plans to intervene in judicial

system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state's justice. The country may enter in low risk political uncertainty due to the opposition plans to file a non confidence motion. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning is becoming an advanced base close to Russia.



SERBIA: September 3rd, the opposition "Alliance for Serbia" was formally established in Belgrade by its founders; Dragan Djilas, Bosko Obradovic [Serbian Movement Dveri (Srpski pokret Dveri)], Vuk Jeremić [New Serbia (Nova Srbija – NS)], Zoran Lutovac [Democratic Party (Demokratska stranka - DS)], Borko Stefanovic [Serbian Left (Levica Srbija)], Milan Stamatovic [Healthy Serbia (Zdrava Srbija)], Nebojsa Zelenovic [Together for Serbia (Zajedno za Srbiju)], Janko Veselinovic [Movement for Reversal (Pokret za Preokret)], Zeljko Veselinovic (United Trade Unions of Serbia), and Slavisa Ristic [Serb Movement from Kosovo and Metohija "Fatherland" (Otdzbbina)]. (www.b92.net)

- September 7th, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic has decided not to talk to representatives of Pristina in Brussels. Vucic will not talk to Kosovo President Hashim Thaci as it was scheduled for September 7th, 2018 in Brussels, and the question is whether talks with Pristina will continue, and when. According to the Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija Marko Djuric, the President decided to do this because of the Kosovo Albanians' deceit, threats and lies. Also, Djuric pointed out Kosovo attempts to render talks meaningless are unacceptable, as is the attempt (of Kosovo President Hashim Thaci) to present Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac (three

municipalities in south Serbia) as part of Kosovo territory. *“The only territory to be discussed is the territory of Kosovo and Metohija,”* Djuric added. Earlier, Vucic ordered the Army, and then asked the Police and the Intelligence Agency (BIA) to stop any communication with the Kosovo Police and KFOR. He also ordered all communication to be cut with any Albanian and international representative acting in the territory of the autonomous province of Kosovo (in the occasion of his planned upcoming visit to Kosovo). (www.b92.net, www.tanjug.rs)

- September 7th, the Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic called the international community *“To no longer test either (Serbia's) patience or understanding.”* According to Brnabic, the international community should understand the seriousness of the situation in the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina, and to act accordingly. Brnabic stated that *“A great deal of patience”* is necessary to conduct talks with the Albanian representatives of Kosovo, because they are *“Frivolous, irresponsible and unpredictable,”* but also that she did not understand some representatives of the international community who do not react to the non-fulfillment of Pristina's commitments. She also stated that President Aleksandar Vucic has done more to build good relations between Serbs and Albanians than any other politician and *“Certainly in the last one hundred years.”* (www.b92.net)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Relative security stability. Serbia's path towards the EU and NATO goes through Kosovo case resolution. Although dialogue has started in Brussels is full of obstacles which undermine establishment of confidence and good will

between two parties. However, Vucic's statements show that Serbia is ready to compromise recognizing that it cannot gain everything through negotiations. The scenario of partition and exchanging territories is not a new one but it sounds more as a communicative trick than a realistic solution. Actions of ethnic minorities in Serbia such as Albanians in south Serbia or Muslim Bosnians in Sandzak region touch the sensitive issue of national security of the state. By expressing neutrality and maintaining equal distance from the U.S.A and Russia it moves in an environment of fragile balance. Serbian President and Government assess that current international “atmosphere” is in favor of Serbia after a long political and diplomatic isolation of the state.



SLOVENIA: September 5th, Slovenia's outgoing Prime Minister and future Foreign Minister Miro Cerar said before the Parliament that he will propose no change in state's foreign policy. Speaking about the Slovenia – Croatia border dispute he claimed that this issue has been resolved with the Hague's arbitration ruling. Moreover, Cerar said that the new Government will insist on Croatia's implementation of the Court's decision. *“We will not abandon our stance,”* he said. However, he claimed that he is in favor of good neighboring relations with all countries including Croatia. Cerar said that he supports dialogue but not regarding the essence of the arbitration ruling. *“Slovenia has fulfilled its obligations regarding the arbitration agreement and has begun to implement the arbitration ruling while Croatia has not done it yet,”* Cerar stressed. He emphasized that Croatia's denial to implement the Court's ruling violates international and European law and for that reason Slovenia has sued Croatia to

the EU Court of Justice in Luxemburg. Cerar said that even if the Court rejects Slovenia's complaint, arbitration decision would not be put under question. He concluded by saying that he would be satisfied if Croatia would have start to implement the Court's decision before the EU Court of Justice delivers its decision. (www.total-croatia-news.com)

- September 6th, Police has arrested two people suspected of inciting violent changes to the constitution. One of the arrested is Andrej Sisko, former presidential candidate. *"In the past couple of days the Slovenian Police has been working on the case, connected to the published photographs on social media networks, with the utmost seriousness and in line with its statutory powers. An intensive pre-trial investigation was lead by the District State Prosecutors' Office in Maribor. Crime officers from the Maribor police Directorate and the General Police Directorate started conducting 5 house searches today in apartments and vehicles. In line with the Criminal Procedure Act, two suspects have been arrested. Taking part in the whole operation are 40 crime officers,"* informed the General Police Directorate (GPU). According to the GPU, the investigation is being carried out in the areas of Maribor and Murska Sobota. Photographs of masked men armed with cold weapons (axes) and firearms, posted on social media, caught the attention of Slovenian social network users at the end of last week. The only one not wearing a mask was Andrej Sisko, who commanded the procession. Sisko confirmed that he commanded the group but added that it was not a paramilitary unit, but a *"Voluntary defense group of the free people of Štajerska,"* called the Stajerska Guard (Štajerska Varda). Sisko claimed that his group would secure order if necessary, adding that it was doing

nothing illegal - although he acknowledged that weapons it uses have not been registered with the Slovenian authorities. The Slovenian President Borut Pahor expressed his concern after internet footage showed masked members of an armed group led by a fringe politician conducting training exercises. *"President Pahor stresses that Slovenia is a safe country in which no unauthorized person needs or is allowed to ... illegally care for the security of the country and its borders,"* Pahor's cabinet said in a statement. (www.dnevnik.si, www.rtvsllo.si)

- September 7th, the Port of Koper (Luka Koper) will participate in NATO military exercise "TRIDENT JUNCTURE 18" in October regarding logistic shift from Slovenia to Norway. The Slovenian contribution will include vehicles and personnel that will carry out the shift to the location of the exercise and the procedures for reception, accommodation and further deployment. Slovenia's Ambassador to NATO Jelko Kacin explained that NATO basically tests the supply routes and logistical equipment within the framework of military exercises in peace, so that the Allies are adequately prepared for mediation during a conflict. If such a test shows that an integral part of the route is effective, one can talk about long-term cooperation. Kacin highlighted Europe's clear understanding that more troops should be transferred ensuring adequate military mobility, and in this area considerable financial resources will be available in the future. In this context, Kacin also emphasized the excellent geographical position, of Luka Koper, explaining why both civilian and military contractors decide to use its services. (www.dnevnik.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

A coalition Government of five parties is about to be formed. LMS's initiative to form a coalition Government was successful bringing strong signs of political stability in the country. Although the new Government is a minority one enjoying support of The Left party looks determined to implement its mandate focusing in social care. After a long period of uncertainty and substantial lack of governance Sarec's Government may work on Slovenian economy, foreign affairs, and social care. Signs of extremist elements are a new "headache" for state's security services raising concerns over security situation of Slovenia.



TURKEY: September 7th, a

Turkish court sentenced the former Head of the pro-PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi - HDP), Selahattin Demirtaş, to four years and eight months in jail for carrying out terrorist propaganda. The court sentenced Demirtaş, who has been in jail since 2016 while on trial for terrorism-related charges, over his comments during a 2013 speech when the Government was holding peace talks with the PKK. The court also sentenced former HDP lawmaker Sirri Sureyya Onder to three years and six months in prison on the same charges in the same case. Formed in 1978, the PKK has fought a long separatist battle with the Turkish state. Its campaign has killed more than 40,000 people, including women and children. The Turkish Government has long accused the HDP of having close links with the PKK. In November 2016, 13 HDP lawmakers were arrested, and 9 of them, including HDP co-Chair Figen Yuksekdag, remain under arrest awaiting trial on charges related to being

members or leaders of PKK committing crimes in its name. Lawmakers face prosecution under anti-terrorism legislation after their parliamentary immunity was lifted in May 2016. (www.dailysabah.com)

- September 7th, a joint statement has been issued after the trilateral summit held between Turkey, Iran, and Russia in Iran's capital Tehran. *"There could be no military solution to the Syrian conflict and it can only end through a negotiated political process,"* the statement said. Leaders expressed their *"Satisfaction with the achievements"* of the Astana format since January 2017, in particular, the progress made in *"Reducing violence across the Syrian Arab Republic and contributing to peace, security, and stability in the country."* Iran, Turkey and Russia *"Emphasized their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, as well as to the goals and principles of the UN Charter highlighting that they should be respected by all."* The three leaders *"Rejected all attempts to create new realities on the ground under the pretext of combating terrorism,"* while expressing determination to stand against separatist agendas aimed at undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and national security of neighboring countries. Moreover the Presidents Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Hassan Rouhani underlined the need for establishing the necessary conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their original places of residence in Syria. The three parts also called for the UN and its humanitarian agencies to help Syria by providing additional humanitarian aid. Next round of Syria talks between the three countries' leaders will be held in Russia, the statement said. (www.dailysabah.com)

- September 7th, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, who attended the Pakistan Defense Day reception, welcomed military cooperation with Pakistan and indicated that their mutual efforts will continue. *“We will continue our fight against terrorism regardless of its origin and motive. Our cooperation with the Pakistan Armed Forces is very important for us. Pakistan and the Turkish Armed Forces will continue to support each other and cooperate in fields including the fight against terrorism,”* Akar said. Praising Turkish-Pakistani friendship, Akar expressed his gratitude that Pakistan stood by Turkey during the failed July 15th, 2016 coup attempt. Commenting on the cooperation between the two countries, Pakistan Air Force Military Attaché Brigadier General Imran Ashgar Chaudhry said: *“The nation of Pakistan assures its Turkish brothers that we have and we will stand with you under all circumstances. The relationship between us will continue to grow stronger in counter-terrorism defense collaboration.”* Military cooperation between Turkey and Pakistan has been increased recently. On July 10th, 2018 the Turkish Defense Industries Undersecretariat (SSB) announced a Pakistani contract for the purchase of T129 Advanced Attack and Tactical Reconnaissance Helicopters (ATAK), which will be delivered gradually over five years from Turkey. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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


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

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NOTE

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