



**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.

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: March 30th, Prosecution has requested information from the US Embassy in Tirana regarding Tom Doshi MP candidate. (www.exit.al)

- April 1st, legal changes made by the Albanian Assembly have simplified the appointment of the remaining 3 members of the Constitutional Court (CC). (www.exit.al)

- April 2nd, Albania was ordered to pay 110 million Euros to Italian businessman Francesco Becchetti following the “politically motivated” Government closure of his AGON television channel in 2015. (www.exit.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Twenty days before the parliamentary elections of April 25th, 2021 reports from international organizations highlight deterioration of human rights and democratic rule in Albania. Although pre-electoral climate is not polarized, international governmental and non-governmental pressure for fair and free elections is considered as targeting the Edi Rama's Government. Conviction of Albania by an international arbitration Court to compensate (with 110 million Euros) an Italian businessman for the closure of his Albanian TV station back in 2015 due to “political motivation” of the Government, confirms international voices for media freedom in the country. These parliamentary elections are of critical importance for the country, since are considered as the way out of the long political crisis it suffers. The country continues to suffer from corruption, links between politicians, businessmen and organized crime, drug smuggling, money laundering,

violation of media freedom, weak democratic rule, absence of public administration transparency, and weak enforcement of rule of law. It should be underlined that the country has established legal framework for several issues as mentioned before but its executive bodies refuses or avoid from implement them. In the geopolitical field, Albania has developed very close relation with Turkey (not only interstate relations but also personal relation between the Prime Minister Edi Rama and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan). In short, Turkey exercises significant influence in Albania through direct investments, donations, military cooperation and cultural projects.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

March 30th, Bosnia's House of Representatives dismissed the Minister of Human Rights and Refugees, Milos Lucic from the Democratic National Alliance (Demokratski Narodni Savez - DNS), with 21 votes in favor and 13 abstentions. The decision was made by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Zoran Tegeltija. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- March 31st, the Chinese Ministry of National Defense had donated 15 engineering machines and vehicles including six brand new military unloading trucks, two tank hauliers with semi-trailers, two trucks with a loading crane, three backhoe loaders, one bulldozer and a compact loader with spare parts, at Rajlovac Barracks near Sarajevo. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- April 1st, a Serbian security news portal reported on Thursday that the Republika Srpska (RS) Police are buying weapons from a South African

company for its armored vehicles. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- April 1st, on April 1st, 2021 Bosnia and Herzegovina started receiving gas supplies from Russia via the TURKSTREAM pipeline, facing the possibility of US sanctions. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- April 1st, the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, urged Bosnia's three Presidency members in a letter to get engaged in the implementation of "limited constitutional change that is necessary to reform the electoral system consistent with the requirements of the EU membership and the rulings of the European Courts." (www.ba.n1info.com)

- April 2nd, the Bosnian Croat member of the tripartite BiH Presidency, Zeljko Komsic, wrote to Brussels on Friday, saying his country is exposed to political pressure from Moscow and interference from neighboring Croatia and Serbia through local political parties. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Dynamic political activity has been recorded in Bosnia last week. The US is pushing the country to forward a limited amendment of the Constitution aiming to modernize its electoral system which shows significant democratic deficit. The EU is also keen on that adopting in fact the Croatian approach in the issue. It should be highlighted that under current electoral system certain ethnic groups are banned from running in top state's positions. Amending the Constitution could be perceived as the first attempt of the international community to modify the Dayton

Peace Agreement; an agreement which undoubtedly stopped a war but has a lot of political and democratic deficits. Russian engagement in Bosnia is visible since Moscow is trying to take in advantage its special relation with Serbia and Republika Srpska, and political change in Montenegro. Experts do not exclude attempts of destabilization of the country by the Russian factor. The energy factor has engaged also in the Russia – US rivalry for influence in the Balkans due to Bosnia's decision to join the TurkStream; an unacceptable decision for the US which threatens Bosnia with sanctions. Serbia and Croatia continue to treat Bosnia as their protectorate interfering in its internal affairs. Bosnia is far from joining the EU since the country suffers from high rates of corruption, absence of rule of law, difficulties in respect of human rights, weak public administration, democratic deficit and its economic performance is one of the lowest in Europe. Current political and geopolitical situation not only in the region, but also in Europe favors the acceleration of the accession process in EU and NATO. Current political situation in Bosnia could be instrumentalized by the rival political forces raising nationalist rhetoric for their internal goals and interests.



BULGARIA: March 29th, Sofia – Skopje relations have entered a new crisis following the publication last week of a report by the International Institute for the Middle East and Balkan Studies (IFIMES), a Slovenian think tank. The Bulgarian Government suspects the North Macedonian Government is behind the report, which calls Bulgaria the "ugly face of the EU" and claims Bulgarians were former Bogomils,

Macedonians and Turks, forcibly “Bulgarianised” after the San Stefano Peace Treaty. (www.novinite.com)

- April 4th, Bulgaria’s parliamentary elections headed into the final stretch ahead of polls closing at 8pm, with problems on voting machines reported from various places, allegations of vote-buying, websites penalized for illegally publishing exit polls and indications on strong interest in voting abroad. (www.sofiaglbe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Parliamentary elections were held in Bulgaria on April 4th, 2021. Despite minor functional problems and allegations for vote-buying, elections are considered as a way of stabilizing political situation in the country, while citizens would externalize social dissatisfaction which was expressed with long protests last year. There are those who claim that the April 4th vote would be a protest vote, while some others strongly support the view that ruling GERB will win once again the elections. Bulgaria – North Macedonia relations remain tense due to Sofia’s decision to block Skopje progress of accession negotiations. Currently, this tense is strengthened by minor incidents (such as posts, verbal attacks, diplomatic incidents etc) which maintain a rather “hostile” situation between the two countries. Bulgaria appears determined to push further North Macedonia, despite pressure from EU member states to soften its stance, until an accepted resolution would be reached regarding the language and history disputes. 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.



CROATIA: April 1st, Croatian “Viktor Lenac” shipyard has undertaken a contract for a regular overhaul of three US naval vessels. The US Sixth Fleet vessel USS Hershel “Woody” Williams has arrived this week, while the other two arrived earlier; the USNS Trenton and USNS Carson City. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- April 1st, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, a summary of which was presented at a government meeting on Thursday, envisages projects worth 49.08 billion Kuna covering six areas. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Croatia enjoys political stability, looking in the near future of the country following the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government announced an ambitious national recovery plan seeking to strengthen the Croatian economy. Accession in the Schengen Zone and Eurozone is a strategic goal since it will benefit the state regarding economy, trade, and security. Illegal migration in borders with Bosnia remains a major problem for the country, despite the significant reduce of migrants last two months. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces’ modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: March 29th, the Committee of inquiry looking into the now-defunct citizenship-by-investment (CBI) scheme will

deliver its interim report to the attorney-general on April 6th, 2021. The European Commission has initiated infringement proceedings against Cyprus over the matter. Effectively the Commission alleges that Cyprus was “selling” passports to investors who did not have real bonds to the country. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- April 2nd, de-escalation of tensions by Turkey in Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) should have duration and consistency, President Nicos Anastasiades said on Friday during a teleconference with European Council President Charles Michel. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cypriot administration is prepared for the 5+1 informal meeting of the Cypriot question scheduled for April 27th – 29th, 2021. Expectations are very low since the two sides go to the meeting with substantial disagreements. Cypriot side advocates the solution of a bicomunal – bizonal federation with decentralized competencies for the federal parts, while the Turkish Cypriot community supports the idea of two independent and sovereign states. The EU is seeking to play a more active role in the coming meeting but it is doubtful if Ankara will allow it. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize). 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: March 29th, Greece’s cabinet approved a national recovery plan that it hopes will boost economic growth by as much as

7% over the next six years and create tens of thousands of jobs. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- March 31st, a pair of Turkish F-16 fighter jets flew over the Makronisi and Anthropofagoi islets in the eastern Aegean on Wednesday, the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (GEETHA) said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- March 31st, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias met with Turkey’s Ambassador to Athens, Burak Ozugergin. Talks focused on bilateral relations and regional developments ahead of the Greek minister’s likely visit to Turkey on April 14th, 2021 Athens-Macedonia news agency reported. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 1st, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis’ announced visit to Libya will take place on April 6th, 2021 a Government Spokesperson said on Thursday. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 1st, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias will meet with his Turkish counterpart “*if conditions allow it*,” Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Alexandros Papaioannou reiterated during a press briefing on Thursday. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 2nd, the Chief of the Greek Armed Forces, General Konstantinos Floros said he is satisfied by the level of understanding shown by the US on issues relating to Turkey, noting that the country “*acts as a provocateur*” in the wider region. (www.ekathimerini.com)



The Chief of National Defense General Staff,
General Konstantinos Floros
(Photo source: www.geetha.mil.gr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Greece enjoys political stability and the Government is working on the recovery plan of the Greek economy after the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Government an ambitious plan of almost 30 billion Euros will ensure economic growth and new jobs for the country. It is not a secret that the Greek Government enjoys public acceptance due to the management of migrant flows in the Greek – Turkish land borders, the Greek – Turkish crisis last summer and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Greek – Turkish front, the Greek Foreign Minister is prepared for his visit to Ankara on April 14th, 2021 where he will meet with his counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu. Greece highlights in the highest level that Turkey must abstain from provocative actions if it really seeks to de-escalate tension between the two parts and to normalize their relations. Despite diplomatic efforts, Greece implements an ambitious project for strengthening the Armed Forces seeking to modernize the Navy and Air Force power by purchasing new frigates and fighter jets. Greek authorities are fully aware that tension with Turkey in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean

Sea could break out at any time. The Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis together with the Foreign Minister, Nikos Dendias have initiated a diplomatic effort to restore relations with the interim Government of Libya seeking to take into advantage the political change in the North African country. The task of this initiative is obvious; to decline the Turkish influence in Libya and to promote the Greek geostrategic interests in a country which shares common maritime borders with Greece.



KOSOVO: March 29th, the Kosovo Serb party Serbian List (Srpska Lista) submitted a complaint to Kosovo's Constitutional Court, reacting to the decision of Prime Minister Albin Kurti to designate only one representative of the Kosovo Serb community as Minister in the new cabinet instead of the usual two. (www.prishtinainsight.com)

- April 2nd, “The decision to set up a KSF base has been taken by the Kosovan authorities. We will thus refer you to them for any comment,” NATO said in a statement to KoSSev when asked whether they are aware, agree with, or whether they have participated in the decision to build the largest KSF base in Kosovo in South Mitrovica. (www.kossev.info)

- April 4th, the Kosovo Assembly has elected Vjosa Osmani as the new President of Kosovo after she received 71 votes in the third round of voting. (www.prishtinainsight.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Kosovo has a new President, Vjosa Osmani who was elected with simple majority by the Assembly.

By electing Osmani who was proposed by the ruling LVV as the new President, Kosovo avoided new snap elections. The ruling coalition partner Serbian List which represents the Kosovo Serbs are complaining because they received only one ministerial post instead of two. It is not a secret that the Prime Minister, Albin Kurti is following an aggressive policy towards Serbian List because he believes that it is the “long hand” of Belgrade in Kosovo. In other words, Kurti seeks to limit the Kosovo Serbian party role in Kosovo politics, believing that it acts destabilizingly receiving and executing direct orders from Serbia. Speaking about the Belgrade – Prishtina relations, Kurti from the very first moment made clear that it is not his priority highlighting that Serbia should recognize Kosovo and then normalization of relations could be reached. However, Kurti has not unveiled his real intentions yet. The EU and US urge the new Kosovo Government to sit on the table of dialogue but it is not clear yet what Kurti will do. Prishtina’s decision to establish a KSF base in Southern Mitrovica (according to a NATO leak) could destabilize not only Kosovo but the wider region. Deployment of military forces in a region where the Serbian ethnic community lives is received as a threat against the Serbian entity’s peace and security. Organized crime, corruption, money laundering, weak public administration, absence of rule of law, controlled justice, transactions between politicians and criminals are persistent “open sores” for Kosovo.



MOLDOVA: March 31st, a state of emergency was declared in Moldova for a period of two months. A decision to this effect was adopted by Parliament on March 31st, 2021 by

the votes of 52 MPs of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) and of the For Moldova platform that includes the MPs of the Șor Party (Șor Party – SOR). (www.ipn.md)

- March 29th, President Maia Sandu said Parliament failed to vote in a Government by two attempts within 45 days of the first request to invest the candidate for Prime Minister and more than three months have passed since the Chicu Government resigned. Therefore, the legal circumstances for dissolving Parliament appeared and the Constitutional Court will be asked to ascertain these circumstances, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political crisis in Moldova is continuing with political forces to totally ignore society and Moldovan citizens. Currently, we witness a struggle for political power and control of the country between the old political elite (namely PSRM and its leader Igor Dodon) and the emerging one (PAS and current President Maia Sandu). Sandu knows very well that it has to eliminate Dodon’s power and his mechanism in state’s institutions if she really seeks to establish her power. Both leaders use any constitutional or parliamentary trick seeking to promote their political plan. Sandu seeks to call snap elections, while Dodon tries to avoid them. The Moldovan President is very close to achieve her goal, but PSRM leader blocked any further proceeding for dissolution of the Parliament by declaring state of emergency for the country for next two months. In short, for the next 60 days the Parliament cannot be dissolved and consequently elections cannot be called. The result is that Moldova has an interim

Government with limited competencies amid the COVID-19 pandemic and a society moving to the edge of poverty. Moldovans are fed up with corrupted political elite which is interested only in its privileges ignoring social needs and demands. Political turbulence in Moldova has also geopolitical aspects. The west namely the EU, US and NATO strongly support political change in the country favoring the pro-western PAS as the leading force, while Russia is seeking to maintain current political balance (PSRM) which favors its political plans. The “Transnistrian case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: March 29th, the Minister of Justice, Human and Minority Rights Vladimir Leposavic said that none of what he is accused of in, as he said, a monstrous and dangerous campaign regarding statements about the recognition of the genocide in Srebrenica, is true, and that he will not resign because his resignation was asked for by those who have proven to persistently ignore the right to equality, even for victims, who try to hide their criminal past, and the post-war profiteers who have not contributed to the reconciliation of the people. (www.rtcg.me)

- March 30th, Minister of Foreign Affairs Djordje Radulovic reiterated that the Government of Montenegro cannot withdraw the decision to expel Serbian Ambassador Vladimir Bozovic, because that would be a violation of conventions. (www.rtcg.me)

- March 31st, the Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic offered the Democratic Front

(Demokratski Front – DF) leaders Andrija Mandic and Milan Knezevic a compromise according to which the key recommendations of the Venice Commission (VC) on prosecutorial laws would be implemented in stages, through amendments by the Government and the parliamentary majority, Pobjeda has learnt.

- April 1st, Defense Minister Olivera Injac has passed decisions on dismissing Majors Radule Covic and Ivica Simonovic from the Intelligence and Security Directorate (OBD) and reassigning them to other duties, even though they were appointed to the OBD sector less than 2 months ago, Pobjeda has learnt. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The ruling coalition is facing a small crisis due to the Justice, Human and Minority Rights Vladimir Leposavic’s disputed statements on Srebrenica genocide. Deputy Prime Minister and URA leader, Dritan Abazovic rejected Leposavic’s statements, while opposition asks for the Minister’s resignation. Moreover, the Prime Minister has to deal with DF hardliners who are not willing to cooperate within the Government as long as the prosecutorial law amendments do not forward. Weakness of adoption of this law by the Government could provoke the first serious intergovernmental crisis. Under current circumstances, turbulence and political provocation against the Government motivated by foreign circles aiming to topple the ruling coalition could not be excluded. The EU and US consider the Montenegrin ruling coalition as pro-Russian setting a threat for the Southeastern Europe political and security stability. Although, Montenegro is a NATO member and is in the process of accession negotiation with the EU, the

two organizations are suspicious towards the Government. Montenegro needs 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 is closer to the EU accession than any other Western Balkan country but current political situation puts at risk its European future.



NORTH MACEDONIA: March 29th, leaders of Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija - SDSM) and Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE), Zoran Zaev and Hristijan Mickoski reached an agreement in a meeting to postpone census until September as well as local elections. (www.mia.mk)

- March 30th, the US Deputy Assistant of State Secretary Matthew Palmer said that it is urgent North Macedonia to hold its first intergovernmental conference with the EU. (www.mia.mk)

- March 31st, Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani observed that North Macedonia's relations with Bulgaria have reached an all-time low, after Bulgaria's blockade of North Macedonia's EU accession talks and the daily exchange of angry comments, insults and accusations. Osmani blamed the coming elections in Bulgaria for the worsening of the relations. (www.republika.mk)

- April 2nd, after a delay of one day, the North Macedonia's Parliament voted today to postpone the census from April to September. Parliament also approved to postpone the municipal elections from the first to the second half of October. (www.republika.mk)

- April 2nd, the Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev said that he expects a solution to the dispute with Bulgaria to be found in May or June, after the Bulgarian elections, and that North Macedonia will begin its EU accession talks by the end of the year. In a TV interview, Zaev insisted that he will not accept negotiations for the "Macedonian" national identity. (www.republika.mk)

- April 2nd, the President Stevo Pendarovski has decided to deploy the Army, along with the border Police, to protect the country's southern and northern borders from illegal migrant flows. (www.mia.mk)

- April 3rd, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced a collection of activities that should result in creating a new ten-year foreign policy strategy under the title "Reflection 2030" which will establish a new doctrine of diplomacy based on three pillars; broad civil consultations, organized thematic conferences and the establishment of a Foreign Policy Strategic Council. (www.mia.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling SDSM was forced to postpone national census for September 2021. An agreement was reached with opposition VMRO-DPMNE but ethnic Albanians did not welcome the postponement, since national census is considered as vital for North Macedonia's Albanian

community interests. Bulgarian blockade of North Macedonia's beginning of accession negotiations with the EU is a thorn for the countries progress and growth. North Macedonia's authorities expect (rather they wish) Bulgaria to change (soften) its stance after the parliamentary elections of April 4th, 2021. The Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev appeared confident that a solution will be reached by May or June 2021. North Macedonia is obliged to compromise with Bulgaria if it really seeks to hold its first intergovernmental conference in June or July 2021.



ROMANIA: March 29th, Romania's Ministry of Justice completed and submitted to the Superior Council of Magistracy (CSM) the amendments to three justice laws; the law regarding the status of judges and prosecutors, the law on the judicial organization and the law regarding the CSM. Amending the justice laws is one of the key topics on the agenda of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) evaluation conducted by the European Commission. (www.romania-insider.com)

- March 30th, Romania's Prime Minister Florin Citu saw his call for cooperation, launched to the opposition Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), turned down vocally by the PSD leader Marcel Ciolacu. (www.romania-insider.com)

- March 31st, the plenum of the Chamber of Deputies rejected, on Wednesday, the simple motion initiated by the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) against the Minister of Agriculture, Adrian Oros. (www.nineoclock.ro)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country enjoys political stability, since the ruling coalition is stable and coherent. Public dissatisfaction due to strict restrictive measures for the COVID-19 pandemic has expressed by protests in Romanian cities. It is noticed that opposition tried to capitalize these protests seeking to exercise pressure towards the Government but without any concrete result. The Government currently forwards the judicial reform; a pressing demand not only of the Romanian society but also the EU. Besides, one of Romania's main objectives is the accession in the Schengen Zone and justice reform is an integral part of the evaluation process through the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM). Romania enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO. After redeployment of the US military forces from Germany, Romania is upgrading into the advanced bastion of NATO against Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries and the Alliance perceiving it as a threat against its national security.



SERBIA: March 29th, the local elections in the southern Serbian town of Presevo ended in a stalemate with none of the parties winning enough votes to form the local administration. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 29th, the US Ambassador to Serbia Antony Godfrey said on Monday that the construction of the Morava Corridor would help the country “to become an important player in the Balkans and Europe.” (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 29th, the European Parliament Chief negotiator in Serbia’s inter-party dialogue Vladimir Bilcik said he expected the negotiations between the country’s ruling and opposition parties about the election’s conditions to secure the participation of all political organizations in the 2022 ballot would resume early next month. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 31st, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi said he hoped the negotiations on Serbia’s EU membership would be faster, but only if Belgrade implemented reforms, particularly those fundamental. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 1st, President Aleksandar Vucic said on Thursday that regional stability is impossible if the Serbs are humiliated and defeated. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 1st, the World Bank is projecting a growth of 5% of the GDP for Serbia this year, the Beta news agency said on Thursday. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 1st, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said he has no intention of criticizing China, adding that it is a country that is very friendly to Serbia. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Serbia enjoys a significant place in Southeastern Europe geopolitics due to its central location in

geographic terms. In this context, Serbia is developing huge infrastructure and energy projects which affect not only the country but also neighboring and regional states. Inter-party dialogue is about to begin in early April but both sides (the Government and extra-parliamentary opposition) are not appeared very keen on compromising. Opposition is determined to go on the streets starting a row of protests aiming to destabilize the ruling coalition. Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic is balancing skillfully between the west and Russia. The Serbian doctrine of neutrality is a flexible maneuver to justify Belgrade’s approach with Moscow and Beijing. Russian and Chinese companies have “penetrated” in Serbia implementing significant infrastructure projects expanding simultaneously their influence in the region. In Kosovo – Serbia dialogue Belgrade appears ready for talks and compromise. Corruption, organized crime, public administration accountability, media freedom are the main internal challenges for the country. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.



SLOVENIA: March 30th, Igor Zorcic remains National Assembly Speaker. The coalition failed to unseat him after he quit the Modern Centre Party (SMC) deputy group, as 45 voted in favor of the dismissal, one short of the required majority. The vote was closely watched as an indication of the governing coalition, but Zorcic rejected such idea claiming the outcome “does not forecast that the government will not have a majority in the future.” (www.sta.si)

- March 31st, Anton Balazek stepped down as interim head of the opposition Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) at the party council meeting. Brigita Cokl will be in charge until the election congress, which is expected in June. (www.sta.si)

- April 3rd, four centre-left opposition parties tabled a motion asking the National Assembly to impeach Prime Minister Janez Jansa before the Constitutional Court. Opposition accused him of violating several articles of the constitution and laws, pertaining to healthcare, media, prosecution and human and constitutional rights. In their motion, the List of Marjan Sarec (Lista Marjana Šarca - LMS), Social Democrats (Socialni Demokrati - SD), Left (Levica) and Party of Alenka Bratusek (Stranka Alenke Bratušek - SAB) accused the Government of failing to order Slovenia's share of COVID-19 vaccines in full. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The minority Government of Janez Jansa enjoys fragile stability. Opposition is constantly "attacking" the ruling coalition by filing motions of no confidence against its Ministers and lately it has targeted the Prime Minister himself. However, there are little chances to witness a political crisis in Slovenia. The country is prepared for taking over the EU presidency from July 1st, 2021. Media freedom in Slovenia has been put under the EU microscope and is monitored closely. Besides, it is not a secret that the Slovenian Government together with the Hungarian and Polish ones are considered by Brussels as a "thorn" for the EU. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of

modern equipment and manning. Their operational readiness is under question and it is assessed that they cannot accomplish their mission. Currently, Slovenia has joined several military projects seeking to modernize its Armed Forces.



TURKEY: March 29th, the protocol enabling Turkish and Azerbaijani citizens to travel with identity cards between the two countries will enter into force on April 1st, 2021 the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced. "The new practice starting as of April 1st, 2021, will strengthen our already existing strong ties with Azerbaijan as expressed in the motto 'one nation, two states,'" it added. (www.dailysabah.com)

- March 30th, Turkey has launched the latest phase of the ongoing "Eren" operations in the country's east, "Eren-12 Güneşli" to eliminate terrorist elements, the Interior Ministry announced on Tuesday. (www.dailysabah.com)

- March 30th, the Turkic Council's upcoming official summit in Istanbul will strengthen the unity of the Turkic World, Turkic Council Secretary-General Baghdad Amreyev stated Tuesday ahead of an informal virtual summit on March 31st, 2021. It consists of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Uzbekistan as member countries and Hungary as an observer state. (www.dailysabah.com)

- March 31st, Turkey's Constitutional Court has sent an indictment calling for the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi - HDP) to be banned back to the

Prosecutor citing procedural grounds, state media reported. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 4th, top Turkish officials lashed out at an open letter signed by more than 100 retired Admirals warning about a possible threat to a treaty governing the use of Turkey's key waterways. (www.aljazeera.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Turkey pays currently special attention in promoting unity of Turkic nation as a “tool” of extending influence in several region's countries such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In this context, the Turkic Council has a central role as an institution which establishes and promotes the Turkic concept. Besides, the active and substantial military support of Turkey to Azerbaijan during the latter's successful war with Armenia over the Nagorno Karabakh region has upgraded Ankara in the “eyes” of region's countries. In the context of a multilateral and multifaceted foreign policy, Turkey provides funding, military assistance, educational and cultural projects, donations and health support in several countries in Central Asia, Middle East, North and Eastern Africa, Caucasus and Southeastern Europe. The Turkish foreign policy works on emerging Turkey as the leader not only of the Turkic nations, but of the Muslim world. It should be underlined that despite the Ankara – Washington deteriorating relations, US top officials keep on praising the role of Turkey in the western security architecture. Relations with the EU are warming again under the pressure of Germany which sees in Turkey a large market seeking access. A thorn in Turkish aspirations for regional supremacy is its economy and the hard hit Turkish Lira.

Turkish citizens are almost desperate due to high prices of ordinary goods. Democratic rule and human rights are further deteriorating in Turkey. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Turkish security forces continue to launch operations against Kurdish PKK which is considered as a significant threat against the state's national security.


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NOTE

 Stable situation. No security risk.

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.

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

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

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