



**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.

#### **“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE**

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**ALBANIA:** April 5<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Edi Rama and Health Minister Ogerta Manastirliu announced that the new Regional Hospital in Fier promised by the Turkish Government will be opened in a few days. The new hospital will have 380 employees, 50 of which will come from Turkey. The construction of the Fier hospital was promised by President Erdogan during Rama's visit to Turkey in the first days of January. (www.exit.al)



The new hospital of Fier, Albania  
(Photo source: www.kryeministria.al)

- April 7<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister Edi Rama accused President Ilir Meta of attempting to stage a coup by agitating air traffic controllers of ALBCONTROL to suspend their work at the Tirana airport, thus bringing air traffic to a halt. The Government decided the Albanian Army and Police will take control over the country's only international airport. (www.exit.al)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Just two weeks before the parliamentary elections of April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, political temperature is rising in Albania. A "non-confessed" strike of the air controllers of the only international airport of*

*Albania in Tirana has provoked the outbreaking of harsh accusations between the Prime Minister Edi Rama and the President, Ilir Meta. According to Rama, air-controllers' abstention from work was motivated by the opposition and the President himself. The Government engaged the Army and Police to secure the airport's function, while Rama said for "attempted coup d' etat" by the President. The incident happened amid international pressure for free and fair elections. Moreover, reports of international governmental and non-governmental organizations claim that Albania is suffering from high rates of corruption, money laundering and links between politicians, businessmen and organized crime. Albania is considered by a lot of experts as a "captured state" namely the Government has established a mechanism which puts public affairs in the service of specific interests of state's top officials. The April 25<sup>th</sup> elections are crucial for Albania since it might exit the country from the long institutional and constitutional crisis. In the geopolitical field, Albania has developed very close relations with Turkey. Albanian economic dependence from Turkey is steadily increased. In short, Turkey exercises significant influence in Albania through direct investments, donations, military cooperation and cultural projects.*



## **BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:**

April 5<sup>th</sup>, Milorad Dodik, the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), said last night that everyone would be calmer if there were an independent state of Republika Srpska (RS) and Herceg-Bosnia (Herceg-Bosna). Zeljko Komsic reacted to these allegations. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- April 5<sup>th</sup>, Bosnia's state gas company, BH Gas, said it submitted a criminal complaint against the importer of Russian gas for unilaterally changing the route to the new Turkish stream, accusing the company of letting neighboring Serbia be in complete control of Bosnia's gas supply. (www.ba.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Nationalistic rhetoric is on the rise once again due to Bosnia Serb leader, Milorad Dodik's persistence to promote Republika Srpska's secession as the only viable solution for his people. Muslim Bosnians (Bosniaks) and Bosnia Croats react in such a scenario which according to the Bosniak leader, Bakir Izetbegovic would lead to a war. However, such a scenario is not likely in the near – mid future. Bosnia has become a field of rivalry between the US (and EU) and Russia. Taking into consideration that Bosnia is not an EU and NATO member state, one could understand the reason that Bosnia has been targeted by Moscow. In other words there is fertile soil for influence activity towards the country. Besides, Bosnia lacks national consciousness and unity due to ethnic entities' interests which overshadow the state's ones. Experts do not exclude attempts of destabilization of the country by the Russian factor. Energy sector could become a field of tense in the near future due to Sarajevo's decision to strengthen its dependence on gas supply from Russia. Currently the national gas company BH GAS has highlighted the danger of Bosnia to become fully dependent from Serbia (and consequently to Russia) regarding energy security. Under current situation the US may push Bosnia for rapid progress regarding the country's NATO*

*accession. Croatia and Serbia continue to treat Bosnia as their protectorate interfering in its internal affairs. Bosnia is far from joining the EU since the country suffers from 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.*



**BULGARIA:** April 6<sup>th</sup>, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects Bulgaria's economy to grow by 4.4% this year and in 2022, according to its latest World Economic Outlook report. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- April 6<sup>th</sup>, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Grazhdani za Evropeisko Razvitie Balgariya – GERB) received the largest share of the vote in the April 4th, 2021 parliamentary elections, with six parties and coalitions surpassing the parliamentary threshold, data from the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) showed. GERB received 26.18% of the votes, ahead of the There Is Such a People (Ima Takav Narod - ITN) party formed around cable television presenter Slavi Trifonov, which had 17.66%. The largest opposition party in the previous National Assembly, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (Balgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP), was in third with 15.01%. Predominantly ethnic Turk Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi - DPS) was fourth with 10.49%, ahead of Hristo Ivanov's Democratic Bulgaria (Demokraticzna Balgariya - DB) centre-right coalition, with 9.45%. The coalition between former Ombudsman Maya Manolova and "The Poison Trio," the organizers of the anti-government protests in summer 2020,

surpassing the parliamentary representation threshold with 4.72%. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- April 6<sup>th</sup>, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (Balgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP) leader Kornelia Ninova said on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 that the party's entire executive bureau had resigned in, but she herself was not stepping down. (www.novinite.com)

- April 9<sup>th</sup>, the Central Election Commission removed on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021 the Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov from the list of elected MPs upon receipt of his request. (www.novinite.com)

- April 9<sup>th</sup>, Bulgaria's Central Election Commission (CEC) announced the seat distribution in the 45th National Assembly, with the full list of MPs set to be made public next week. Prime Minister Boiko Borissov's Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Grazhdani za Evropeisko Razvitie Balgariya – GERB) will have 75 MPs in the next Parliament, followed by the There Is Such a People (Ima Takav Narod - ITN) of Slavi Trifonov, with 51 seats. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (Balgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP) won 43 seats and the predominantly ethnic Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi - DPS) 30 seats. Hristo Ivanov's Democratic Bulgaria (Demokratichna Balgariya - DB) will have 27 seats and the coalition between former Ombudsman Maya Manolova and “The Poison Trio,” the organizers of the anti-government protests in summer 2020, won 14 seats. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■:

*Parliamentary elections of April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021 were a protest vote which generated tectonic political surprises demolishing the old establishment. Although the ruling GERB got the first place, its political strength has significantly reduced. The main opposition party, BSP suffered a debacle forcing its executive bureau to resign. ITN was the big surprise by getting the second place in the elections. It is notable that the coalition between former Ombudsman Maya Manolova and “The Poison Trio,” the organizers of the anti-government protests in summer 2020 passed the threshold and entered the Parliament. Finally, the ethnic Turkish DPS achieved to strengthen its power. Looking into the next day of elections, Bulgaria is facing uncertainty since it is rather difficult to see a viable coalition Government. GERB, BSP and DPS have little possibilities to join a ruling coalition; current Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov said that ITN leader, Slavi Trifonov should “assume responsibility and form a Government.” It is very likely to see an experts Government or a caretaker one. In short, Bulgaria is marching with one or another way towards new elections. Besides, the time is running in favor of the newly emerged political powers which are very likely to see their power to be increased in a new electoral race. It should be also underlined that these elections could be considered as a personal defeat of the Bulgarian President, Rumen Radev who was deeply engaged in the pre-electoral race and saw his political “home” – BSP- to suffer an unexpected defeat. Bulgaria – North Macedonia relations remain tense due to Sofia's decision to block Skopje progress of accession negotiations. Current political instability could affect a resolution of the dispute between the two countries in short term. 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 6<sup>th</sup>, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) revised down its forecast for Croatia's GDP growth in 2021 to 4.7% in a report published on Tuesday. They added that they expect economy to pick up and a return to its pre-pandemic level in 2022. (www.hr.n1info.com)

### COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*Croatia enjoys political stability and seeks to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic which badly affected its economy. With an ambitious national recovery plan the Government seeks to restart 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:** April 6<sup>th</sup>, the EU remains committed to the relaunch of the Cyprus settlement talks and fully supports the UN-led process as an active observer, European Council President Charles Michel said on Tuesday after meeting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- April 9<sup>th</sup>, expectations from the informal summit on the Cyprus problem set to take place in Geneva at the end of this month hinge on Turkey's positions, President Nicos Anastasiades said on Friday. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- April 10<sup>th</sup>, Cyprus has asked EU borders agency FRONTEX marine patrols to halt migrants sailing from Turkey's southern coast to the island's north Interior Minister Nicos Nouris said. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- April 11<sup>th</sup>, there is no "British plan" on the table, Minister for European Neighborhood and the Americas Wendy Morton said on Sunday, clarifying that the UK's only interest in the Geneva talks was to encourage both sides to show the flexibility for a compromise that the UN Security Council is also seeking. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

### COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*Cypriot President, Nikos Anastasiades is trying to shift the burden of the success or failure of the 5+1 informal meeting on the Cypriot question scheduled for April 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021 to Turkey underlying the positive or negative role it could show. 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:** April 5<sup>th</sup>, Greece called for the departure of foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya, while urging the new Government of the war-torn country to scrap an agreement on maritime boundaries with Turkey which Athens says violates international law. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 5<sup>th</sup>, a pair of Turkish F-16 flew over the Panagia and Oinousses islets in the eastern Aegean on Monday, the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (GEETHA) said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 5<sup>th</sup>, the annual Air Force exercise “*INIOCHOS 21*” will take place at the airport base of Andravida, in northwestern Peloponnese, from April 12<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021. Particular aircraft include the following: AW139 helicopter (Cyprus), Rafale and Mirage 2000 (France), F-15, F-16 (Israel), F/A-18 Hornet (Spain), F-16 (United Arab Emirates), and F-16, MQ-9, KC-135 (United States). (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 6<sup>th</sup>, in his first visit to Libya, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis called on the interim Government to scrap an agreement on maritime boundaries signed with Turkey in 2019, which Athens says violates international law. Mitsotakis reopened Greece’s Embassy in Libya. (www.ekathimerini.com)



The Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis with his Libyan counterpart Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh

(Photo source: [www.primeminister.gr](http://www.primeminister.gr))

- April 9<sup>th</sup>, Dimitris Koufodinas, serving multiple life sentences for his part in the murders carried out by the “*November 17*” terror group, returned to his cell in the high-security facilities of Domokos penitentiary on Friday, 27 days after he ended his hunger strike. (www.ekathimerini.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*Greek diplomatic activity is focused on Libyan affairs, since the political change in the North African country offers a chance for Greece to strengthen relations, to limit Turkish influence and to promote the Greek strategic interests. The main objective task of Greek diplomacy is to persuade Tripoli to cancel the bilateral agreement with Turkey which delimitates the maritime zones between the two countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and is considered by Athens as illegal because it violates the international maritime law by including sea zones which belongs to the Greek Exclusive Economic Zone. However, the Libyan interim Government appeared reluctant in such a scenario and Athens’ task is rather infeasible. In this context and despite ongoing talks between Greece and Turkey, it is assessed that escalation of tension between the two parts could emerged at any time*



*Ankara considers as convenient for its interests. The Greek Foreign Minister is prepared for his visit to Ankara on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021 where he will meet with his counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu but expectations are low for any tangible result. Besides, Turkey continues its provocative actions in the Aegean Sea by violating the Greek air space with armed fighter jets. Greece constantly highlights that Turkey must abstain from provocative actions if it really seeks to de-escalate tension between the two parts and to normalize relations. Following the conclusions of the last summer crisis between Athens and Ankara in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean Sea 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. The country needs not only to maintain balance of power in the region, but to achieve air and naval superiority for protecting the Greek vital interests. Apart from military armaments, Greece is promoting strong defense cooperation with several regional countries aiming to strengthen its external balance as a tool of deterrence of Turkish provocative actions. The country enjoys political stability and the Government enjoys acceptance among citizens.*



**KOSOVO:** April 5<sup>th</sup>, Vjosa Osmani became Kosovo's new President late on Monday after three rounds of voting in Pristina's Parliament with 70 out of 120 Deputies in her favor, promising to strengthen the state, the rule of law and to protect every inch of its territory, but warned there would not be peace before Serbia repented. (www.n1.info.com)

- April 6<sup>th</sup>, the Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani said that the fate of the missing people during the 1998-1999 war should be the priority in the Pristina – Belgrade dialogue on the normalization of relations. (www.n1.info.com)

- April 9<sup>th</sup>, the EU expects Kosovo to focus on the dialogue on the normalization of relations with Belgrade after the new institutions are formed, EU's Spokesperson Peter Stano has said on Friday. (www.rs.n1info.com)

### **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :**

*The newly elected President, Vjosa Osmani is in full line with the Prime Minister, Albin Kurti regarding the Prishtina stance over its relations with Serbia. Osmani has set as the condition for normalization of relations with Belgrade recognition of Kosovo as an independent and sovereign state, while she did not miss to highlight missing people as a top issue. It is assessed that Kosovo – Serbia dialogue has little chances to proceed and tangible results to be reached, although the EU is pushing Prishtina to join dialogue. 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:** April 9<sup>th</sup>, Action and Solidarity Party (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS) MPs Sergiu Litvinenco and Veronica Rosca filed an application to the Constitutional Court over the declaring of the state of emergency. (www.ipn.md)

### **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :**

*Political crisis in Moldova continues and the struggle between the President, Maia Sandu and the leader of PSRM, Igor Dodon has no end. Actually it is a fight between two political establishments; it's a fight for gaining control of the country. It is assessed that nobody cares for citizens and social problems. Sandu is marching on the edge of constitutional order seeking to dissolve the Parliament and call snap elections. Socialists with a "smart" move achieved to block any further step by the President by declaring the country in state of emergency for next two months. Sandu's decision to ignore the Parliament could be considered as a strategic mistake and actually this persistence has created this deep political crisis. On the other hand, Dodon and PSRM have a mechanism which controls state's institutions, while the Government and the parliamentary majority have more competencies than the President; a dimension which Sandu did not consider before. Currently, the country is in a political deadlock and only elections which will not take place before August can resolve the crisis bringing back stability. 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:** April 7<sup>th</sup>, it is very likely that Minister of Justice, Human and Minority Rights Vladimir Leposavic will resign, and there is a lot of bargain in the ruling coalition,

CdM has learnt from well-informed sources. (www.cdm.me)

- April 8<sup>th</sup>, leaders of the parliamentary majority reached an agreement in principle yesterday on prosecutorial laws, according to which the Democratic Front (Demokratski Front - DF) has given up its intention to abolish the Special State Prosecutor's Office through changes in those legal acts, Pobjeda reports. (www.cdm.me)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**   :

*Partners of the ruling coalition appear confused trying to balance between the west and Russia. Moreover, pressure of the EU and US towards the Government is tremendous not only publically but mostly in the backstage. The ruling coalition is in the awkward position to justify on daily basis its actions, to persuade for its good intentions, that it is not promoting a secret agenda, and that it remains committed to the Euro-Atlantic values. Under this constant pressure minor intergovernmental misunderstandings or disputes could be evolved into major political crisis. However, DF has backed down from its refusal to support the cabinet's draft laws in the Parliament stabilizing the ruling coalition's position. The opposition enjoying the western support is trying to destabilize the Government and the first protests have appeared in the Montenegrin streets. 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. 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:** April 6<sup>th</sup>, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) leader Hristijan Mickoski said that his party would not accept the numbers of the registered non-resident population. (www.mia.mk)

- April 6<sup>th</sup>, the Minister of Interior, Oliver Spasovski, informed at a press conference tonight that a group that issued North Macedonia's passports to foreign nationals under assumed identities who did not have biometric documents has been dismantled. The group included people who worked in the administrative services of the Police. (www.republika.mk)

- April 6<sup>th</sup>, the European Commission expressed its hopes that after Bulgarian parliamentary elections of April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Skopje and Sofia will reach a compromise (www.mia.mk)

- April 11<sup>th</sup>, Kosovo Albanian Islamist Fitim Dema was given a North Macedonia's passport in 2018, revealed today Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација –

Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) official Antonio Milososki. (www.republika.mk)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Elections in Bulgaria and the new political situation which is configured in the neighboring country have strengthen North Macedonia's hopes for a settlement between Skopje and Sofia which will unblock the beginning of North Macedonia's accession talks with the EU. Brussels expressed the same hopes for North Macedonia's European future. However, a scandal of illegal passports granted to several foreigners involved in organized crime cases raises strong concerns for the country's credibility and effectiveness. The case confirms high corruption of state's officials, links between politicians, public servants and organized crime and potential money laundering. Concerns also raised regarding security affairs since there are suspicions that radical Islamic terrorists coming from the Middle East it might have been granted North Macedonia's travel documents. North Macedonia enjoys visa free regime for travelling in the EU countries and such a case could threaten its continuation. The EU and US have avoided to comment the case so far but it is certain that they monitoring closely situation.*



**ROMANIA:** April 5<sup>th</sup>, the Head of the American diplomacy, secretary of state Antony Blinken might come to Romania in the second half of this year to mark 10<sup>th</sup> years of joint statement on the Strategic Partnership and the agreement on the missile shield in Deveselu. His Romanian counterpart, Bogdan Aurescu has already sent Blinken the invitation, after the two

discussions they had last week. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- April 7<sup>th</sup>, Romanian liberal leader Ludovic Orban expressed severe criticism against the reformist Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR) - Party of Liberty, Unity and Solidarity (Partidul Libertate, Unitate și Solidaritate - PLUS) Minister of justice Stelian Ion, who sent the new justice laws to the Magistrates' body Superior Council of Magistracy (CSM) without the ruling coalition's consent and claimed to have informed the Venice Commission, "although he did not," G4media.ro reported. (www.romania-insider.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

*Judicial reform has stuck in intergovernmental and intraparty disputes. It is rather a matter of PNL rivalry for power, namely the party's leader Ludovic Orban and the Prime Minister and ambitious rival for the PNL leader seat, Florin Citu, than a dispute within the ruling coalition. It is assessed that dispute will be overcome and there is no risk for the coalition's stability and cohesion. 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:** April 6<sup>th</sup>, Nikola Selakovic, Serbia's Foreign Minister, told on Tuesday Mari Yamashita, UN Secretary-General's Representative, Director of the UN Office in Belgrade, that the UN was the most important international organization for his country and called on its UNMIK mission to remain committed to the implementation of the Resolution 1244 on Kosovo. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 11<sup>th</sup>, Serbia's Assembly Speaker Ivica Dacic, said that representatives of the European Parliament, who are mediators in talks on electoral conditions between the authorities and the opposition, the most interested in the "boycotting opposition" and the groups around the leader of the Party of Freedom and Justice (Stranka Slobode i Pravde - SSP), Dragan Djilas, and even the leader of the Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska Stranka - SDS) Boris Tadic. (www.rs.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

*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. The ball on Belgrade – Prishtina dialogue is in the Kosovo court since the new Prime Minister declares that talks with Serbia is not his priority. 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:** April 10<sup>th</sup>, the Government has established a strategic council for digitalization as an advisory body to the Prime Minister, which primary task will be proposing concrete measures and legal acts in the field of digitalization. (www.sta.si)

### COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*The minority Government of Janez Jansa enjoys fragile stability. The country is prepared for taking over the EU presidency from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 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:** April 5<sup>th</sup>, Turkish authorities detained 10 former Admirals after a group of more than 100 retired senior Navy Officers issued a statement that Government officials tied to Turkey’s history of military coups. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 6<sup>th</sup>, the US’ sanctions targeting some Turkish officials and institutions over the country’s purchase of the advanced S-400 Russian air defense system will be in force as of Wednesday, the State Department announced late Monday. (www.dailysabah.com)

- April 6<sup>th</sup>, the EU’s top two officials expressed “deep worries” about human rights in Turkey while voicing hope for stronger ties during their first meeting in a year with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Tuesday’s discussions in the capital, Ankara, came on the heels of Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, which combats violence against women, and the launch of a formal attempt to shut down the country’s pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi - HDP). (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 7<sup>th</sup>, the Turkish Government is determined to bring down interest rates and inflation to single digits, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, sounding more eager than his new central banker to lower borrowing costs. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 8<sup>th</sup>, Ankara late Wednesday condemned the Greek Deputy Foreign Minister’s “provocative” remarks against Turkey and its President that could escalate tensions. (www.dailysabah.com)

### COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*The open letter of 100 retired Admirals regarding the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s plan to construct the Istanbul canal putting at risk the Montreux Convention was considered by Turkish authorities as a “political coup” against the state’s democratic authorities. Judicial*



authorities did not hesitate to arrest 10 of the involved retired officers; a very common practice by the Erdogan rule. Apart from that, Erdogan has to deal with PKK, the pro-Kurdish militant organization which is considered as a direct threat against the state's security. EU's top officials visit in Ankara seeking to re-strengthen ties between the two parts was overshadowed by the incident with the EU Commissioner Ursula von der Leyen. However, the EU expressed to Erdogan its concern for respect of human rights in Turkey highlighting withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and the launch of a formal attempt to shut down the pro-Kurdish HDP. Turkey declares that joining the EU is a strategic goal but it is doubtful if it really seeks to approach Europe and especially the European values. Turkey continues its active role in a multilateral and multifaceted foreign policy including soft and hard power simultaneously. 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. However, the US sanctions against Turkey due to the Russian S-400 system came into effect. It is assessed that there are possibilities of a common accepted solution to be reached; for instance transport of the system in the territory of another country as it happened with the Cypriot S-300 which transferred to Greece following the strong reaction of Turkey. Erdogan appeared optimistic with the Lira crisis and the high rate of inflation in the country which makes ordinary life of Turkish citizens extremely difficult. Turkish authorities continue to violate human rights, media freedom and democratic rule. Arrests of political opponents, journalists who criticize the ruling AKP and political activists is a common practice. Elected MPs,


Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Turkey could not be considered as a democracy but rather as a “hybrid democracy” since the President adopts authoritarian practices.


[www.hermesresearch.eu](http://www.hermesresearch.eu)


email: [info@hermesresearch.eu](mailto:info@hermesresearch.eu)


Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas


#### 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.