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SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

“SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE” (ISSN: 2654-0304) is a weekly review of the most significant current political, economic, energy, defense, and security news of Southeastern Europe. It covers 14 countries; Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. However Greece enjoys its own weekly review for a more detailed presentation of its current affairs (GREECE AT A GLANCE).

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

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ALBANIA: June 24th, Ambassador Philip T. Reeker, Assistant Secretary for Eurasia at the US State Department, has held a phone conversation with Prime Minister Edi Rama. This phone conversation, requested by Reeker, has been confirmed exclusively for Top Channel by journalist Muhamed Veliu, through two separate diplomatic sources, and from another source at the Prime Minister's Office. The same sources have also explained the content of this 20-minute long phone conversation. Reeker has insisted to not make any step back from holding the elections of June 30th, 2019. This position has been held firmly by the US representatives in the last months, and it was reinforced once again in this phone conversation. On the day when President Meta repealed the decree that had set June 30th as the Election Day, Top Channel reported that Reeker had held a meeting with the Eurasia department, to analyze Meta's decision. The conclusion of this meeting was announced one day later when a US State Department Spokesperson told the Voice of America that they are following the developments in Albania very closely, and is keeping contacts with the respective actors who are legally affected by the President's announcement. The US State Department, according to the Spokesperson, will keep following the ongoing situation. This following up continued this Wednesday, with Reeker's phone call to Rama, when the US Embassy received the next recommendation. Last Thursday found the Deputy Acting Chief of Mission of the US Embassy in Albania, Daniel Koski, at the offices of the opposition leaders Lulzim Basha and Monika Kryemadhi. The message given to them was the most radical in the

history of Albania's pluralism *"Any act of violence from today to July 1st, will force the US State Department to classify you as a violent organization,"* Koski has told them. The American law for violent organizations, which are ranked right after terrorist organizations, is very harsh. It affects all leaders and members of the organization, whose assets are confiscated, bank accounts blocked, together with all possible transactions and real estates. Besides that, they are also not allowed to travel to countries with which the USA has an agreement regarding the fight against violent extremism. This US law is especially specific for all members of these organizations that have had public posts or business activities. This message from Washington, given urgently to Basha and Kryemadhi from Koski, was not confirmed or denied by the Embassy. The effect of this warning was reflected immediately in the protest of this Friday, in which the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) protesters did not throw a single firework. (www.top-channel.tv)

- June 27th, the President of Albania, Ilir Meta, declared that October 13th, 2019, will be the new date of the elections. Meta said that this is the quickest day to organize all-inclusive local elections. The second reason is that it guarantees Albania's EU integration path in the same time with North Macedonia. The Prime Minister Edi Rama reacted immediately after by saying that Meta's decision has no value. Meta underlined that Rama should reflect, since he is not following the attitude of the opposition. (www.top-channel.tv)

- June 30th, the Central Election Commission (CEC) declared that the turnout of the June 30th, 2019 local elections was 21.6%. The number was confirmed by CEC, which reported that 771.863 Albanians have exerted their right to vote. Opposition has claimed for a lower turnout, while the majority has considered this as a referendum in favor of the majority. Now that the ballot boxes are almost all of them gathered at the ballot counting centers, the last process for the June 30th elections is expected to start soon. As expected, the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) did not accept the figure published by CEC regarding the turnout. The General Secretary of the PD, Gazmend Bardhi, declared that the turnout was just 15.12%. The Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, declared in a press release that today's elections were a historic moment, which marked the victory of the future, hope and civility in Albania. *"It was the historical clash between the past and the future; between the anti-state and the rule of law; between the impunity and justice; between the old Albania, with its historical ghosts, and the Albania of justice. It was a decent and righteous victory of the European Albania. It was a difficult victory, maybe the most difficult, because it was the democratic system against the opponents of elections,"* Rama said. PD leader, Lulzim Basha, declared for the media that 85% of the Albanian people refused to vote for the elections and abandoned Rama's masquerade. (www.top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Local elections were held in Albania on June 30th, 2019 as it was scheduled and despite President's

Ilir Meta decision to cancel them announcing October 13th, 2019 as the new election date. Turnout, as it was announced by the Central Election Committee, was extremely low (21.6%), while it is questioned by the opposition. There was strong external pressure mainly by the US to main Albanian political stakeholders that elections should be held as it was scheduled. Next day will be critical for Albanian political stability. The country has entered in an endless crisis undermining its democratic function according to the European values and standards. Rama's efforts to dismiss the President, Ilir Meta are ongoing. In other words, Albania is under a political and constitutional chaos. Questions for a potential civil conflict has been raised showing that situation is totally disappointing. Such situation strongly affected Albania's EU perspective. Combination of political instability, ties between politics and organized crime, and corruption made the EU to postpone the opening of accession negotiations for Albania for the near future. According to the Enlargement Commissioner, situation will be re-examined by October 2019. Rama's Government collapse and snap elections is a possible scenario. The Government is accused of having links with organized crime and current situation raises questions over the power of "Albanian mafia" in the country and its influence in state's politics. Undoubtedly, corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state's problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a "mother nation." The state maintains its leading

role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. In this context, the Albanian Prime Minister and his Government work on promoting Kosovo interests in international community using any forum they have access.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

June 25th, the Republica Srpska (RS) authorities called off their plan to form an Auxiliary Police Unit and said they plan to rename their Support Police Unit into “*Gendarmerie*”. The RS adopted amendments to the Law on Police at the end of March 2019 aimed at introducing an Auxiliary Police Unit in this entity. The Unit would be composed of 1,000 youths who would be summoned only when necessary, the RS Interior Minister Dragan Lukac said then, adding that they would have the same competencies as active Police Officers engaged in Police duties. This prompted fierce reactions in Bosnia's other semi-autonomous entity, the Bosniak-Croat shared Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) which in turn announced requests for the formation of FBiH's Auxiliary Unit. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- June 25th, the US has approved 110 million dollars for the purchase of weapons, within the framework of a program aimed at replacing the Soviet era combat systems with arms of Western origin. According to the Balkan Security Network (www.balkansec.net) portal, the Pentagon will partly finance the procurement of combat vehicles for the Croatian Army and the Army of Northern Macedonia and multi-purpose helicopters for the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and

Albania. In the fiscal year 2017, the US Government launched the European Recapitalization Incentive Program (ERIP) program with an initial 190 million dollars budget to help the Governments of six Eastern European nations replace Soviet arms from their arsenal with Western armaments. Bosnia's Armed Forces have in their possession a Soviet Mi-8 helicopter, inherited from the Republika Srpska (RS) entity's Army and a Mi-8MTV-1 from the Federation entity's Army. The Army of RS is the wartime army of the Serb-dominated part of the country which fought against Bosniak and Croat forces namely the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Croat Defense Council. The three armed formations disappeared when Bosnia's leaders decided to melt all Armed Forces in Bosnia into one; Bosnia's Armed Forces. The reform process was mediated by the High Representative, the international community's top administrator in Bosnia, installed to oversee the implementation of the Peace Agreement that ended the conflict of the early 1990s. Soon after the reform, the country was offered to join NATO's Partnership for Peace, which its authorities accepted. However, the road to the full membership in the Alliance has been in a deadlock for years mostly due to rejection of authorities of the Serb-led entity. The US earmarked 30 million dollars for Bosnia, but this amount is barely enough to buy one or possibly two medium transport helicopters of the American or Western origin. However, it is possible to repair and modernize the used UH-60 Black Hawk or Super Puma helicopters. The portal wrote that everything started as a consequence of tensions in the relations between the West and Russia, which prompted

Washington to launch a funding program that will prompt Eastern NATO members to begin to change the Soviet and Russian weapons with equipment of Western origin. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- June 30th, the long delays in the judiciary's handling of cases in Bosnia and Herzegovina are unacceptable for a country seeking the membership in the EU, Neighbourhood and Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn wrote on social media. Hahn's statement on social networks comes a day after hundreds of citizens staged a peaceful protest in Sarajevo's central square, in support of the parents seeking for justice for their sons who tragically died under still unresolved circumstances. *"Three months ago, I met with the parents of David Dragicevic and Dzenan Memić. Yesterday they and many other frustrated parents and citizens demonstrated peacefully in Sarajevo against the lack of justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina,"* said Hahn, who paid a visit to Sarajevo in late March where he discussed the country's EU path with senior officials, political and NGO representatives. During the visit, Hahn also met the parents of David Dragicevic and Dzenan Memić, who said following the meeting that they were promised EU experts would help to solve their problem. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political instability and uncertainty continues in Bosnia because it has not formed a Government since October 7th, 2018 general elections. The three main parties representing the three constituent entities (Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats); HDZ (Bosnian Croatian party), SDA (Bosnian

Muslim or Bosniak party), and SNSD (Bosnian Serbian party) although they have reached an agreement to cooperate in forming a Government, it seems that they still cannot overcome Bosnia's accession process towards NATO. Bosnian Serbs insist that the country should remain neutral staying out of NATO, Bosniaks remain committed to NATO accession as a precondition for supporting a Government, while Bosnian Croats appears neutral on the issue wishing to overcome the deadlock (although they are in favor of joining NATO) . Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs destabilizing the state. Of course, both entities (Croats and Serbs) take in advantage "Dayton Peace Agreement" weaknesses and malfunctions. Russia pays special attention in Serbia and Bosnia in order to maintain its influence in the region. Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, and Montenegro have already entered NATO, while North Macedonia would join the Alliance within 2019. These two countries (Serbia and Bosnia) are the only "vehicles" for Russia to maintain a narrow influence in Southeastern Europe. Apart from external influence and intervention the country has to confront several internal "threats" which undermine its sovereignty, cohesion, and viability. EU path is too far for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU. Election of ultra nationalist pro-Russian Serb Milorad Dodik in the tripartite Presidency is a strong sign of more nationalistic rhetoric and more obstacles towards Bosnia's EU

and NATO (mostly) integration. Dodik is a person who does not actually believe in B&H viability and is expected to promote (actually, he has already started) his own political agenda. Abandoning of Republika Srpska's plans to establish an Auxiliary Police Unit is a positive step towards reducing tensions between ethnic communities in the country. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turke, and other Muslim countries approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests.



BULGARIA: June 25th, a decision will be taken by the end of July on how much to reduce state subsidies for political parties, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov said after a meeting of the coalition council of the partners in the ruling majority. Bulgaria's Parliament has approved the first reading of a bill reducing state subsidies for parties and coalitions that got more than 1% of the vote at the most recent election from 11 leva (about 5.50 euro) to 1 lev, but a second reading vote that had been scheduled for June 21st, 2019 was postponed. That move came against a background of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi - DPS) having changed its position on the issue, from proposing cutting the subsidies to zero leva, to now wanting subsidies retained at 11 leva per valid vote. Borissov, speaking after talks with United Patriots co-leaders Krassimir Karakachanov and Valeri Simeonov, and with the deputy leader of the third party in the United Patriots, Dessislav Chukulov, said that consultations in Parliament on the issue would begin. The Prime Minister and leader of

the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) party said that his party remained firmly in favor of a subsidy of one lev per valid vote in the most recent election. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- June 29th, Russian specialists will not participate in the overhaul of the Bulgarian Air Force's Su-25 military jets, Defense Minister Krassimir Karakachanov said. Karakachanov rejected the possibility a few days after it was raised during a visit to Moscow by a parliamentary delegation headed by National Assembly Speaker Tsveta Karayancheva. The idea was discussed between Karakayancheva and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, according to Parliament's website. Karakachanov said that Bulgaria already had paid Belarus the first tranche for the overhaul of the Su-25s. Visiting Graf Ignatiev military air base, he said that of the Bulgarian Air Force's 14 Su-25s, five flew, of which one was due to be grounded. *"That leaves four, which if by July, August, steps are not taken, will be grounded and the Armed Forces will lose capabilities."* The overhaul would be done in Belarus, he said. Karakachanov said that he assumed political responsibility for the implementation of the contract, which amounts to 82.5 million leva (about 42.18 million euro). According to his opinion the contract does not violate the arms embargo on Belarus. If the contract did not go ahead, Bulgaria would face having to pay a penalty of four million leva, he said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- June 29th, the price requested by the US to sell to Bulgaria F-16 fighter jets is 2.2 billion leva *"and I do not know where [President Roumen Radev] he*

gets 3.2 billion from,” Defense Minister Krassimir Karakachanov said referring to the President’s claim of a “hidden billion” in the proposed deal. Radev, a former Bulgarian Air Force Commander before becoming Head of state, made the claim of a “hidden cost of a billion” in a January 28th, 2019 television interview. He said that the US was offering the fighter jets without adequate armaments and equipment. Bulgarian National Radio reported that Karakachanov said that the US offer had been sent to Radev at the President’s request 10 days ago. He said that there would be revisions to the contract, but the President had been informed at each stage when he had asked. Karakachanov said that if the contract was signed, by the end of July, the process would be over; “We will report to the Cabinet, it will have to make a decision and table it in the National Assembly, and if Parliament approves the proposal, in July it can be concluded,” he said. He said that there were things about the contract that he did not like, and had said so. “Given his rank, the President could have contacted his American counterpart and if there are any considerations, to state them and to help a bit in this process, because it is easy to criticize, but difficult to get the job done,” Karakachanov said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Junior partner of the ruling coalition, United Patriots remains the vulnerable and unpredictable piece of the inter-governmental stability; none could predict when a new incident or dispute will break out. Thus, Bulgaria has entered in a period of rather stable political situation. After European elections, opposition

BSP appears weakened facing internal problems. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. However, the EC made clear that Bulgaria could not enter the Eurozone before 2022. Apart from that the European Parliament adopted a resolution for the accession of Bulgaria (and Romania) in Schengen Zone. However, it is questioned if the European Council will receive a unanimous final decision for Bulgaria under the current migration pressure. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Although modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc) military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards. The latest report on defense situation confirmed the major problems the Bulgarian Armed Forces are facing. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: June 24th, according to the Vecernji list daily, international arms dealer Zvonko Zubak has offered to Croatia 12 Brazilian Mirage 2000 fighter jets for 76 million dollars. Croatian Defense Ministry officials declined to make any official comments on the report, noting only that any decision will be made by the Government and the office of the President. However, unofficial sources have confirmed that the Ministry has contacted both the French and Brazilian authorities. Croatia was set to buy 12 used F-16 fighter jets from Israel for roughly 450 million dollars. However, the sale

was ultimately quashed by the US as Israel failed to obtain permission from Washington to sell the jets it had received for free from the US. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- June 26th, Croatia will send next week a letter to Brussels expressing its intent to join the eurozone, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic announced in an interview with Croatian Radio on Wednesday morning. Plenkovic had held several meetings on the margins of the recent EU summit as part of the preparation of the Croatian strategy for the adoption of the European single currency, the euro. He met with European Central Bank President Mario Draghi, European Commission Vice-President for the Euro Valdis Dombrovskis, Eurogroup President Mario Centeno, and President of the Eurogroup Working Group Hans Vijlbrief. *“All four men are key for the acceptance of our letter. We are taking the first step to become what is called European Exchange Rate Mechanism II. I think we did very good consultations with both the Central Bank and the Commission, specifying several reform areas on which we will be working over the next year,”* Plenkovic said. He said that the letter of intent would be sent in the middle of next week. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- June 28th, the departure of Foreign and European Affairs Minister Marija Pejcinovic-Buric in October, when she is set to become the new Secretary General of the Council of Europe, has raised questions about a possible cabinet reshuffle. A number of Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic's Ministers are burdened by scandals and there is speculation that it may be a good opportunity to cut them loose. However, it appears the Prime Minister is in no hurry. The

senior Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ) MP in Parliament, Branko Bacic said Friday the issue of who will succeed Pejcinovic-Buric has not been addressed yet. He added that the Foreign Ministry has been working hard to prepare for when Croatia takes over the presidency of the EU on January 1st, 2020. *“Not everything is up to the Minister, her closest associates are very much involved in the process, so there will be no vacuum,”* said Bacic. Interior Minister Davor Bozinovic dismissed speculation that he would succeed Pejcinovic-Buric as Foreign and European Affairs Minister, noting that he had not been offered the job. Asked if a Government reshuffle is possible, he said that he is not aware of any talks on the matter. Milorad Batinic of the Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats (Hrvatska Narodna Stranka – Liberalni Demokrati - HNS-LD), the HDZ's coalition partners, said he planned to raise the issue of a reshuffle next week at a coalition meeting. *“The idea of a reshuffle is to improve the cabinet and make sure the other Minister follow the pace of reforms being implemented by our Ministers Divljak and Stomar,”* Batinic said. Opposition is doubtful a reshuffle would improve situation. Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske - SDP) MP Pedja Grbin said only an election could fix the problem. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country enjoys political stability and support from EU towards its Eurozone goal. Croatia follows a tough regional policy with neighboring countries. It is openly intervene in Bosnia's

internal affairs, while it maintains open disputes with Slovenia, Serbia, and Bosnia. One should take into consideration that Croatia shows its military strength and capabilities quite often not only in international, but also in national level sending strong messages to neighboring countries. Apart from that, Croatia pays special attention in energy strategy and security announcing ambitious projects. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone. It implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.



CYPRUS: June 28th, in response to Turkey's current activities and future designs in Cyprus' territorial waters, Nicosia issued a navigational telex (NAVTEX) Friday reserving parts of blocks 2 and 3 in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for naval exercises from July 1st to 10th, 2019. Based on recent comments by Turkish Energy Minister Fatih Donmez and other officials, this is the area where a second Turkish drillship, the Yavuz, is expected to anchor to begin exploring for hydrocarbons. Block 3 is also where a natural gas prospect named Squid is located, and where Turkey had prevented exploratory drilling by Italian firm Eni in February 2018. At the same time, Nicosia is reportedly doing everything it can to ensure the participation of French energy company Total in blocks that have already been licensed to Italy's Eni, as well as a consortium of the Italian

company and South Korea's KOGAS. Meanwhile, seeking to pre-empt the stated objective of Turkish-Cypriot officials to settle the fenced-off town of Varosha in occupied Cyprus, President Nicos Anastasiades sent a letter to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on June 24th, 2019 calling for the creation of a Bicomunal Committee that will draft proposals to reconstruct Varosha, a ghost town since the Turkish invasion in 1974. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- June 28th, the US Senate voted in a second piece of legislation, to lift decades-old arms restrictions on Cyprus but requires that the country should continue the reforms on anti-money laundering regulations and deny access to its ports to Russian military vessels. The measures, which appear to mirror those in a new law up for discussion at the Senate, the East-Med Act bill, were passed on Thursday in a law titled the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for the 2020 draft budget. The amendment to the NDAA was introduced by Democratic Senator Bob Menendez, one of the authors of the East Med Act, which passed the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee last Tuesday, and which President Nicos Anastasiades on Wednesday described as unfortunate and an imposition on the island's sovereignty. The East Med Act has not yet been approved by the Senate. Cyprus has a 2015 agreement with Russia for use of port facilities and the East Med Act rules out refueling or support for Russian military ships. The NDAA, however, contains a caveat allowing the President of the US to waive the requirements on Cyprus for one economic year, if it is to the interest of the US to do so. It is not clear whether this will also

be included in the East Med Act during approval by the Senate. Under the NDAA, the lifting of the embargo involves only US military articles and military services requested by the Government of Cyprus and not transfers on Cypriot soil of American made equipment for the Turkish army, the “*Turkish Cypriot Forces*” or Greek military contingent ELDYK (Cyprus’ Greek Force), according to CNA. Foreign Minister Nicos Christodoulides, talking about the East Med Act on Friday morning said the Russian factor was just a reference by the authors of the bill and that Anastasiades would have the opportunity to discuss them with a number of American MPs on Saturday who will be in Cyprus as part of their visit in the region. He said that the bill will have to be approved both by the Senate and the House of Representatives. Then it will be sent to the US President who will have to approve it, he said. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- June 30th, with six letters sent to and four meetings with United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres in the last two years, President Nicos Anastasiades said he is seeking the resumption of Cyprus talks from the point they left off in 2017 in Crans Montana. In an interview with daily Phileleftheros, Anastasiades said dialogue is the only way to solve problems but he warned both the Turkish Cypriot side and international players that in seeking to solve the worries of Turkish Cypriots they cannot leave those of the Greek Cypriots hanging. He said the latest letter sent to Guterres this week underlined the points he has made in the past, and that he is willing to restart negotiations from the point they left off. “*I believe that is the only way to get past any problems,*” he said. The latest letter contained

recommendations made by the President to create the conditions for resuming the dialogue, as well as suggestions to overcome deadlocks. “*At the same time, I repeat the prerequisite for the resumption of dialogue is the removal of Turkish irregularities in Cyprus’ EEZ,*” he said. He stressed that Cyprus is not taking Turkish threats lying down. “*In addition to the legal measures taken by individuals, we have actively engaged the EU for the first time with the decisions taken at the last European Council to impose measures.*” He also referred to the decentralization of powers and the creation of political equality “*not as defined by the Turkish Cypriot side, but as it should be interpreted.*” He added “*it is essential for every process of dialogue to respect each other. In this case, it is important for Turkey to realize it is not through actions that cause tensions and exacerbate the concerns of the Greek Cypriots that a solution will be found.*” Anastasiades said the rights of Turkish Cypriots have never been denied, while convergence has been reached that hydrocarbon issues belong to the central Government, in addition to the distribution of income from the disposal of natural wealth. “*A fund has been created into which any future income from the exploitation of the natural wealth will be deposited and a very large amount is strictly reserved, which is far beyond what is attributable to the Turkish Cypriot community. Therefore, Turkey’s reactions are not justified,*” he said. Turkish drilling in the island’s EEZ shows the biggest contradiction in its policies, Anastasiades said. “*You cannot claim that islands do not have an EEZ, you do not recognize the Republic of Cyprus and therefore its EEZ and recognize that the illegal regime has an EEZ. There is a huge*

contradiction that demonstrates Turkey's intentions." He said a solution to the Cyprus problem and agreement on what happens in the EEZ could help restore a relationship with Turkey, which could even buy the island's hydrocarbons. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus has reached a deadlock in the ongoing crisis with Turkish invasion of drillship Fatih (while the second one Yavuz is also ready to start drills) within its EEZ. Fatih is there more than two months, while Turkish administration declares that offshore drilling will start soon. Despite international calls to Turkey for abandoning its plans of violating the Cypriot EEZ and its sovereign rights, Turkish actions remain "unanswered." Announcement of Cypriot administration that arrest warrants have been issued against workers in the drillship are interpreted as spasmodic actions of a trapped state which cannot act decisively and effectively for protecting its sovereignty. Actually, Cyprus is trapped because it does not have a mechanism of power (military, diplomatic, economic etc) to force Turkey to withdraw its ships. Cyprus lacks of naval and air forces which could deter Turkey of violating Cypriot sovereign rights, while Greece appears reluctant in sending naval units in the region showing presence and exercising deterrence. Cyprus working closely with Greece achieved to convince EU leaders to introduce a joint declaration condemning Turkish actions and warning Turkey with undefined sanctions. Turkish message is very clear; we are present in Cyprus, we are present in the energy "game" and nothing works leaving Turkey aside. In other words,

energy security includes Turkey; otherwise eastern Mediterranean is not a stable and secure sea. A "hot" incident cannot be excluded. Announcement of a Cypriot NAVTEX for naval exercises from July 1st to 10th is a sign of possible escalation since Cypriot naval units (small patrol vessels) and Turkish vessels may operate in the same sea area. Despite current situation, Cyprus works systematically in order to become a major part of the East Mediterranean energy hub. It is favored not only by its natural gas deposits, but also by its strategic position in the "heart" of East Mediterranean Sea and of course of being an EU member state. The strategy of multilateral cooperation seems to be fruitful. Cyprus seeks to negotiate and reach agreements with its neighboring countries regarding their EEZ expanding maritime cooperation and energy security. Turkey looks like being isolated from the energy game and its current aggressive reaction is attributed to this situation. It is certain that Turkey will not accept "fait accompli" in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Cyprus improved its bilateral relations with the US, strengthened its defense cooperation with France, UK, and lately develops its defense and security relations with Germany. One could say that Cyprus strengthens defense cooperation with NATO leading countries. The US senate voted on the abolishment of the arms embargo in Cyprus but the term of forbidding Russians vessels from using Cypriot ports may create more problems than it would solve. Although the UN Secretary General appears optimistic for a new round of talks between the two communities, it is assessed that talks could not be resumed with vessels violating Cypriot sovereignty. However, President Nikos Anastasiades appeared of promoting restart

of talks for solving the Cypriot question but suggested that Turkish provocations should stop. 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: June 26th, Greek Defense Minister Evangelos Apostolakis explained Athens' opposition to Turkey's drilling plans off Cyprus during a meeting with Turkish counterpart Hulusi Akar on the sidelines of talks between NATO Defense Ministers in Brussels on Wednesday. *"I expressed our objections to their activities in the Aegean and Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone. I reiterated that we want peace and security but will in no way back down from defending our sovereign rights,"* he said according to a statement. *"We want to avoid tension. Besides, this is the purpose of the talks between our technical teams around over the confidence-building measures,"* he added. The meeting between Apostolakis and Akar came as Greece's National Council for Foreign Policy deliberated earlier on Wednesday over the measures the EU is considering taking against Turkey, should the latter continue with its drilling plans off Cyprus'. Foreign Minister Giorgos Katrougalos briefed party representatives on the Government's initiatives on the matter and the talks held in Brussels. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- June 27th, a signing ceremony took place for hydrocarbon exploration and production rights concerning at least one of two offshore Cretan blocks was attended by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, whose speech emphasized Greece's

effort to utilize the country's mineral wealth and also projected a message opposing Turkey's provocative behavior in the southeast Mediterranean. The Energy Ministry signed the agreement with a three-member consortium comprised of ExxonMobil, Total, and Hellenic Petroleum (ELPE) for an offshore license west of Crete. A second block, situated adjacently southwest of Crete also signed by the two sides. Both agreements will first need to be approved by Greek Parliament before exploration work commences. A first phase of exploratory survey work is planned to last three years. If the feedback is favorable, drilling activities will follow after 2022, according to current plans. Meanwhile, consortiums that have secured licenses for blocks in western Greece are moving to reshuffle their line-ups, energyexpress.eu sources have reported. This activity, a common occurrence in the global oil industry, has been attributed to maneuvering by multinationals for moves to blocks seen offering better prospects as well as efforts to seek additional partners for investment cost sharing. Greece's geopolitical role and blocks are gaining stature on the international map amid all this activity. (www.energyexpress.eu)

- June 27th, opposition New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis underlined the need for a strong mandate from the Greek people if he is to enforce his program *"without caveats and differentiations."* In an interview with Skai Radio, the center-right leader said he was keen to press ahead with a series of reforms after ND wins the general election, which it is widely expected to do. He did not explicitly rule out cooperation with other parties if ND fails to clinch an absolute majority but he stressed that

such alliances could dilute his party's plans. For instance, a possible cooperation with the Movement for Change (Κίνημα Αλλαγής - KINAL) would “*make our work more difficult*” due to the party's objections to ND's plans to revoke an asylum law banning Police from entering university grounds. ND wants to overhaul the law to curb growing lawlessness on and around campuses.



ND leader, Kyriakos Mitsotakis

(Photo source: www.nd.gr)

One of the first bills ND will submit in Parliament, Mitsotakis said, will foresee the abolition of the asylum law, as well as reforms to ensure local authorities remain “*governable*.” Anticipating its defeat in the election, Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) has planned for the next local authority elections in October to be held under a system of simple proportional representation. Mitsotakis aims to restore the existing system, which gives the winning political coalition a majority in local councils. Another goal is to secure the right to vote in national elections for Greeks living abroad. Tackling the

country's demographic problem by offering financial incentives for couples to have children is another priority that the center-right leader underlined. As for his cabinet, Mitsotakis said he has decided on half the members, noting that many will be non-politicians and “*prominent technocrats*.” A day ago, Mitsotakis has stressed that if a majority Government does not emerge from the July 7th, 2019 elections, “*the country will be led back to the polls in August, and it will be with a system of simple proportional representation*,” referring to changes to the Constitution passed through Parliament recently. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■:

Pre-electoral campaign enters in its last week before snap parliamentary elections scheduled for July 7th, 2019. ND is ahead in the polls and its leader Kiriakos Mitsotakis asks for a “clear mandate” seeking to secure parliamentary majority. In the meanwhile, agreement for hydrocarbon exploration and production rights concerning two offshore Cretan blocks, with ExxonMobile, Total, and Hellenic Petroleum is an important step for Greek energy plans and country's energy security. On the other hand it is a period that Greece faces diplomatic and security challenges mainly by Turkey. Internal terrorism is considered as a major unresolved problem of national security undermining stability of the state. Greek – Turkish relations are in critical point due to Turkey's decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills. Moreover, Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial and maritime sovereign

rights. Greece acting in coordination and cooperation with Cyprus achieved to convince EU member states to adopt a rather strict joint declaration speaking for potential sanctions against Turkey if continues to violate Cypriot EEZ. However, sanctions are still far from decided and imposed. A crisis to Cyprus means a crisis to Greece forcing Armed Forces to deploy military, naval, and air units. Taking into consideration that Cyprus lacks of naval and air power it is Greece which will support the small and vulnerable island located in the East Mediterranean heart. Turkish fighter jets keep on violating Greek airspace. It is a fact that Greek political and military leadership is concerned over a potential incident with Turkey, especially if its drillships appear within Greek waters. As Defense Minister Apostolakis said in such a case Greece has no other option than forbid it implying use of force. Strengthening of military cooperation between Greece and the US upgrades Greece's strategic role in Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East as a western (US, EU, NATO) forward military base. On the other hand, Greece is concerned that this upgraded relation with the US may reinforce Turkish aggression in the Aegean Sea. Furthermore, Greece seeks to modernize its Armed Forces by receiving US military aid. It is a fact that Greek military force has been affected by the long economic crisis threatening the balance of power with Turkey. Security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ.



KOSOVO: June 26th, two Ministers in Kosovo Government denied claims of a looming

humanitarian catastrophe in the Serb-majority northern municipalities. Kosovo Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli and Trade Minister Endrit Shala said that Serbian media reports of a humanitarian catastrophe caused by the 100% tariffs imposed by Pristina on goods from Serbia were false, Epoka daily reported. “There has been no humanitarian crisis in Kosovo since 1999 when Serbian forces left Kosovo and there will never be a crisis of that kind,” Pacolli said. He called international community to look into and condemn Serbia’s projects that he said were directed at destabilizing Kosovo. Shala is quoted as saying that claims of food and medicine shortages in northern Kosovo are propaganda and Serbia’s reaction to the tariffs. “This is all propaganda and there is no shortage of food in the north. This is Serbia’s plan against the import tariffs. Every citizen of Kosovo has equal access to food and other goods,” he said. KoSSev news portal editor Tatjana Lazarevic told N1 earlier that there are shortages of goods from Serbia in the north of Kosovo, adding that goods are being sold from diminishing stockpiles with a dose of panic present among the population. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 27th, after Constitutional Court ruled Thursday the Kosovo Negotiation Team is in violation with the Constitution, the opposition party of Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) is asking early election to end political crisis in Kosovo, Gazeta Express reported. Member of Parliament of Vetevendosje Movement, Albulena Haxhiu, appearing before media on Thursday welcomed the referral filed by her party and the other opposition party of Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK),

challenging the Law on State Delegation in Dialogue with Serbia. *“At the time we have asked the Constitutional Court whether the draft law on dialogue is in compliance with the Constitution we were focused in an important point of the Draft Law. The State Delegation in Dialogue with Serbia was above the Assembly and Government. The Constitutional Court ruled today that the Law on dialogue is unconstitutional, saying that the state delegation has no constitutional competencies to represent Kosovo in dialogue,”* Haxhiu said adding that the Constitutional Court ruling is just. Haxhkiu also said that Kosovo President Hashim Thaci is illegally heading the dialogue with Serbia and proposed calling early elections as a solution. *“What we expect now is snap elections,”* she said. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- June 28th, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the US State Department, Matthew Palmer, said Belgrade and Pristina should resume dialogue before elections in Serbia, expected to be held in spring next year. *“Election in Serbia most likely will be held in spring next year and it is important for dialogue to resume earlier, because the election cycle complicates talks,”* Palmer said in an interview with BBC in Serbian. He said Kosovo should rescind tax on Serbian and Bosnia-Herzegovina goods and resume the dialogue with Serbia. Palmer said the format of talks will not change and Washington had no impact in delaying the Paris meeting on July 1st, 2019 where representatives of Kosovo and Serbia were to meet under mediation of French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. *“America supports the dialogue process, we are not part of talks, but we support*

dialogue facilitated by the EU since the beginning,” Palmer is quoted as saying. The State Department official, said US presidential election next year, will not affect the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue process. *“I do not expect the US election will affect the support on normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina,”* he said. Palmer has refuted media reports that Philip Reeker, Assistant Secretary for Eurasia at the US State Department would be involved in dialogue. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo keeps escalating tension with Serbia blocking any chance of dialogue restart. Latest Police operation in the north arresting Serbs (and Albanians), 100% tax on Serbian and Bosnian products, Kosovo Assembly resolution that Serbs committed genocide during 1998-1999 war, establishment of Kosovo Army, request for a special Court for Serbs are just a few actions which undermine any possibility of negotiations with Serbia. By keep repeating in every forum that there is nothing else to talk than “Serbia recognizing Kosovo” it simply does not promote dialogue. Pristina does not hesitate to escalate tension even with an armed conflict. Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci stated that his state could be unified with Albania including parts of south Serbia (Presevo, Bujanovac and Medveja). Such statements are not only immature, but also put under risk peace and stability in the region. Thaci openly speaks for border change and more specific violent change. It is strongly recommended that international community, namely the UN, EU and US should terminate decisively such irresponsible ideas. Under these

circumstances it is not a surprise that meeting between Belgrade – Pristina scheduled for July 1st, 2019 in Paris was postponed. Moreover, internal disputes have emerged regarding Kosovo negotiation team. Constitutional Court ruled President's Thaci leading role as unconstitutional allowing the Government to form a new negotiation team. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. Kosovo seeks its Army to be operating all over the country pushing NATO towards such direction. The presence of Kosovo Army in the north it is assessed of high security risk which may lead in armed violence. One should take into consideration that the Serb President has already ordered all defense and security stakeholders to take all necessary measures for protecting Serbian population in Kosovo.



MOLDOVA: June 25th, Alexandr Esaulenco is the new Director of the Intelligence and Security Service (SIS). Fifty nine MPs out of 86 present at the Parliament meeting voted for Esaulenco's candidacy. At the plenary meeting, the new SIS director took the oath and put forward Artur Gumeniuc for the office Deputy Director of the Service. *"You have taken the oath to the people and a parliamentary majority. We rely on the fact that SIS employees will exercise their power according to the law,"* Parliament Speaker Zinaida Grecianii said after the

appointment of the new SIS Head. Alexandr Esaulenco is 42 years old and he graduated from the Free International University of Moldova in 1999, Faculty of Law, Criminal Law specialization. He has been holding the office of SIS Deputy Director since last November. (www.moldpres.md)

- June 26th, the Magistrates of the Constitutional Court (CCM) have resigned in corpore. A press release to this effect was published on CCM's website. *"Today, 26 June 2019, the Judges of the Constitutional Court resigned in corpore. The ceasing of the mandate and the vacancy of the positions of Constitutional Court Judges will be announced to the authorities in charge of the nomination of new Judges. Judge Mr Veaceslav Zaporozjan was empowered by the Plenum of the Constitutional Court to exercise the administrative powers of the Court's President till the election of the new President,"* the CCM's communiqué reads. The Constitutional Court is made up of six Judges, appointed for a mandate of six years. Two Judges were nominated by the Parliament, two ones by the Government and two Judges by the Superior Council of Magistracy. The constitutional Judges benefit from immunity. They cannot be detained, arrested, searched, and sent to Court without preliminary agreement of the Constitutional Court. Judges can hold office for two mandates. (www.moldpres.md)

- June 27th, Maia Sandu claims that the alliance with the Socialists is not natural, but it is the only solution for liberating Moldova from the oligarchic regime. She declared, during an interview for Politico that it is difficult to say what Russia's real plans are in this coalition *"We do not know. We know that Russia wants to*

maintain its influence on the countries in the region, including Moldova,” writes ZdG. According to Maia Sandu, the Kremlin has encouraged the Socialists to enter the coalition, as the alternative would mean “absorbing” the Socialists in the Democratic Party, and so the influence of Russia would be diminished. In talks with representatives of the Kremlin, Maia Sandu said she has asked Moscow to withdraw its armed forces in the Transnistrian region. “Russia must withdraw troops and munitions from the territory of the Republic of Moldova, and we are open to finding solutions to improve trade and economic relations between the two countries,” Sandu said. Regarding the Transnistrian region, the Prime Minister mentioned that she would like Moldova’s Government to work with Ukraine, although no talks have been held yet, either with the Ukrainian President Volodimir Zelensky, or Premier Volodimir Groisman. Sandu previously accused the Ukrainian Government, led by Petro Poroshenko, of collaborating with Plahotniuc, in order to allow smuggling and “corrupt” care schemes, “urging the survival” of the separatist leadership in Transnistria. “We are now expecting Kyiv authorities to help eliminate these schemes,” Sandu added. (www.moldova.org)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

A long discussion has started regarding co-existence of pro-Western ACUM block and pro-Russian Socialists. By definition, this cooperation is not compatible and it is interesting to watch the motives not only of the two political formations, but also of the US, Russia, and EU which gave the green light in such cooperation. Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one

hand and the Russian influence on the other. There are assessments that this co-existence will not last for long and new elections will come. Newly elected Government enjoying support of PSRM and ACUM block Deputies is moving rapidly in changes of executives in critical state institutions in order to consolidate its power. Prime Minister Maia Sandu openly said that she would prefer to work with Ukraine rather than Russia sending a strong message of her political intentions. The new Government is determined to investigate all “dark” activities of Democrats during their ruling period. Moreover, parliamentary majority has established a Committee to investigate a potential coup attempt by PDM during June 8th – 14th, 2019. It seems that the country has avoided turbulence and political chaos especially after former Prime Minister Pavel Filip announced that PDM will join Parliament as opposition. Needless to say that the country has come in the edge of civil turbulence. Political instability and uncertainty affect vitally in state’s function blocking reforms, harming economy and keeping the country far from European standards. The EU tough policy against Moldova may soften now as a signal of support to the new Government which includes a pro-western party. Such support could be expressed by restarting micro-economic assistance. The ongoing crisis between Russia and Ukraine may affect Moldova; First of all Russia maintains military forces in Transnistrian ground and secondly it shares common borders with Ukraine which cannot be unnoticed by international stakeholders. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: June 24th, the Prime Minister and his Government faced strong critics by opposition over their efforts to address corruption, rule of law, and freedom of the media *“Political system and institutions have never been under such strong crisis and distrust as it was noted by the EU and described in its reports,”* said the President of Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska Partija - SDP), Ranko Krivokapic said. According to him if state authorities continue to downgrade democratic institutions in the country the European perspective of Montenegro will stall delaying or cancelling the state’s accession in the EU. Democratic Alliance (Demokratski Savez - DEMOS) leader Miodrag Lekic wondered why the EU has canceled the intergovernmental conference with Montenegro scheduled for the end of June 2019. According to him, the reason could be the steady or even increased return of Montenegro in undemocratic and authoritarian practices. Lekic asks the Prime Minister whether in the remaining year of his mandate he intends to follow the public initiatives of the Head of the party *“who aggressively starts a new operation to divide and bring tension in Montenegrin society,”* or he will have the courage and autonomy to initiate serious reforms to bring the country closer to the European standards and EU membership. Democratic Front (Demokratski Front - DF) MP Milan Knezevic focuses on another dimension asking the Prime Minister to comment on the direct influence of foreign elements on the procedure and outcome of the referendum on the secession of Montenegro from Serbia, which was confirmed by a published transcript of talks between Milan Rocen and Oleg Deripaska in

2005. Prime Minister Dusko Markovic was about to announce on June 26th, 2019 the Government’s initiatives in the fight against corruption, rule of law, and freedom of the media, which the European Commission highlighted in its last progress report. (www.vijesti.me)

- June 25th, Prime Minister Dusko Markovic told during the Azerbaijan - Montenegro Business Forum that Montenegro is the most stable country in Western Balkans, a country of high economic growth, massive investment in infrastructure, and a NATO member state, recommending to Azerbaijani investors to invest in his country. *“Montenegro is today the most stable country in the Western Balkans, making it an economically and politically reliable partner. For investors, Montenegro is a destination that shares the highest standards and values of security creating an attractive investment environment. In the first year after [NATO] membership, we saw a significant increase of investors and tourists from NATO countries,”* Prime Minister Dusko Markovic said addressing the Business Forum that brought together dozens of Montenegrin and Azerbaijani businessmen. Markovic said that the current state priority is development of the Northern Region, which offers great chances to investors, and that the state invests so far the biggest funds in the construction and renovation of the transport infrastructure. (www.vijesti.me)

- June 29th, President of the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS), Milo Djukanovic, said at the Conference held in Podgorica that his party’s main task was to overcome resistance at the domestic stage which prevented Montenegro

from developing into a stable country and multi-ethnic society. He pointed out that the religious issue had to be settled without further divisions. *“We are facing resistance of those who are actually trying to take us back to beginning. They are trying to undermine our religious identity, our cultural identity which will finally lead to that despicable question that has been permeating our history; why would a nation without national, cultural and religious identity need a state? Why would nations of the same cultural and religious identity live in two separate countries?”* Djukanovic said. He said that his intention is not to make further divisions in Montenegro, or to try to take revenge for the injustice Montenegrin people had suffered. *“Shortly, we do not think we should form Montenegrin Orthodox Church that would not let Serbs in. We are doing this in order to strengthen stability of the country which is, unfortunately, being threatened by Serbian Orthodox Church. We want to overcome divisions since they have become our curse,”* he said. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although EC Progress Report is assessed as a positive one, it raises specific concerns over media freedom, corruption and organized crime. Report is elaborating on specific cases signaling detailed research. Montenegro enters in a crucial crossroad regarding its EU future and specific reforms and actions should be implemented if it remains committed in its goal to access the EU by 2025. Political stability is re-establishing again after DF decision to return in parliamentary Committees. Protests against the President and high officials disturbed a period of “euphoria”,

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



NORTH MACEDONIA: June 26th, the Parliament has continued the state of emergency at the Southern and Northern border until December 31st, 2019 which was proclaimed on August 20th, 2015, due to an increased scope of entrance and transition of migrants through North Macedonia. This is the 8th extension of the state of emergency where the border apart from

the Border Police is secured by Armed Forces including Police forces from several European states. The new decision for prolonging the emergency state was discussed by the Parliamentary Committees for Defense and Security. (www.meta.mk)

- June 26th, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikola Dimitrov, believes that North Macedonia and Bulgaria share common goals and that it will be possible to find a way through mutual friendship and respect, to resolve the problems that erupted in the previous period. *“I am convinced that our country and Bulgaria share major common goals. As neighbors that signed the Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation, which touches on some very delicate and emotional issues for both countries regarding history, I am convinced that we will find a way, through respect for each other and friendship, to avoid jeopardizing these important goals,”* Dimitrov said answering a journalist’s question whether threats from Bulgaria about blocking the process for getting a date to start accession negotiations if there is no agreement on Gotse Delchev, are real. At the press conference after the meeting with the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ine Eriksen Soreide, Dimitrov added that he hopes to have the opportunity to discuss this particular issue during his visit to Sofia tomorrow, where he will attend the meeting of the Black Sea Initiative. (www.meta.mk)

- June 27th, MPs in North Macedonia debated on the recent cabinet reshuffle, which consists on the appointment of six new Ministers. Prime Minister Zoran Zaev said that the Government is expected to focus more on the economy and the improvement of living standards. Zaev said that

the Government will increase salaries and pensions. *“Foreign investments have increased, average wage has increased and several sectors have grown. There’s still a lot of work to do,”* Zaev said. Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) MP Vlatko Gjorcev said that the current Government has failed and that the country must head to early elections. *“Zoran Zaev, you are in the final months of your term in office, because in a few months time, we shall have a Government of technocrats, which VMRO-DPMNE will be part of. Changes will take place in Macedonia [North Macedonia] in the coming months. You and your 28 Ministers shall leave through the vote of the people,”* Gjorcev said. (www.nezavisen.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

VMRO-DPMNE hardens its rhetoric demanding early elections, while the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev tried to change political climate by reshuffling the Government. However, an atmosphere of disappointment is above the country after the EU decision to postpone opening of accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania. Following the European “cold shower” citizens have started to focus on Government’s failures in fight against corruption and organized crime, social care measures, and foreign policy. In other words, domestic politics are not in favor of ruling SDSM and Zoran Zaev. Although NATO accession process is implementing rapidly, EU rejection was a “slap” in the face of North

Macedonia's stability. Zaev based his political survival and dominance in the triptych "resolution of name issue with Greece – NATO accession – opening of EU accession talks." Although the first one was successfully accomplished and the second is proceeding rapidly the third one has stuck. Consequently, VMRO-DPMNE increased its pressure for a caretaker Government and snap elections. Definitely, North Macedonia and Albania are two different cases regarding their EU future and should not be handled as a single package. The threats of nationalism and political instability are covering North Macedonia's sky. The country should focus on its economy and major administrative and judicial reforms, fight against corruption and impunity aiming at reaching the EU standards.



ROMANIA: June 25th, the Venice Commission issued a new negative opinion on Romania's justice reform, specifically on the emergency ordinances OUG 7 and OUG 12 the Government adopted at the beginning of this year, which changed some provisions of the three controversial justice laws the Parliament voted in the summer of 2018. The Venice Commission also criticized the changes to the justice laws in an opinion issued in October 2018, asking Romania to reconsider some of the most controversial provisions. *"The Venice Commission notes with regret that the most problematic elements of the 2018 reform, identified in the opinion of October 2018, either remained unchanged or were aggravated,"* reads the new opinion issued by the Venice Commission. The Commission notes that the Romanian Government continues to make

legislative amendments by emergency ordinances and calls on the Romanian authorities to drastically limit the use of such instruments. *"While the Constitution clearly indicates that this should be an exceptional measure, legislation by GEOs became a routine,"* the Venice Commission said. The international institution also reaffirmed that the reasons for creating a special section for investigating magistrates, with loosely defined jurisdiction, remains unclear. *"Since the Section would be unable to effectively deal with all cases within its competence, it risks being an obstacle to the fight against corruption and organized crime,"* the Venice Commission's members believe. The Commission notes that nothing has changed in the scheme for the appointment and dismissal of top Prosecutors, where the Justice Minister has the decisive role, and recommends that the Prosecutors' Section of the Superior Magistracy Council (CSM) is given a key role in this process. Moreover, the Venice Commission says that *"it is possible to remove currently serving Prosecutors with reference to the new eligibility criteria, arbitrarily chosen,"* and urges the Romanian authorities not to apply the new eligibility criteria to those Prosecutors who were already in place when the respective amendments were made. President Klaus Iohannis had a quick reaction after the Venice Commission's opinion and asked the Government to quickly undo the special section and implement the recommendations of the Venice Commission. Meanwhile, several members of the Superior Magistracy Council (CSM) boycotted the meeting in which the CSM was supposed to assess the candidacy of prosecutor Adina Florea for Head of the section for investigating Magistrates. (www.romania-insider.com)

- June 27th, Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dancila, the interim President of the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), the bigger party in the ruling coalition, has five challengers for the top position within the party. The main counter-candidates are senator Serban Nicolae, a close collaborator of former PSD leader Liviu Dragnea, and Education Minister Ecaterina Andronescu. Dancila has reportedly reached an agreement in the party giving the local leaders more influence in the Ministries in exchange for not running for leading positions in the party, local Adevarul reported. This would bring “new people” at the top of the party, Dancila argued. Dancila is the interim President and the Head of the Government, while her rivals have seniority in the party and good relationship with the leaders in the territory. There are other three lower-profile candidates for the post, namely Liviu Plesoianu, Ilie Rotaru, and Catalin Stoichita. The candidates need the endorsement of the party’s leading body (CEX) on Friday, while the party will elect its leaders in a congress scheduled for Saturday. Deputy Prime Minister and Development Minister Daniel Suciuc and Finance Minister Eugen Teodorovici will compete for the position of Executive President of PSD, the second-highest post in the party’s hierarchy. There are two other candidates for this post, namely Daniel Florea and Sorin Bota. Former Defense Minister Mihai Fifor is the leading candidate for the position of Secretary General, running against a large number of challengers; Marius Dunca, Gabriel Petrea, Felix Stroe, Codrin Stefanescu, and Rodica Nassar. (www.romania-insider.com)

- June 27th, Romanian opposition parties Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR) and PLUS have launched the United Romania (România Unită) project; an agreement to prepare a “*responsible Government*” and directed towards political parties and academic and civil society actors. The two parties spoke of “*an invitation to a responsible political dialogue in order to find the appropriate solutions following the failed act of Government of the current parliamentary majority and to prepare a viable alternative for 2020.*” According to the leaders of the two parties, Dacian Ciolos and Dan Barna, “*it is important that all bona fide forces in society – political, academic, civil society – join this project so as to make sure we offer the electorate the best option.*” The two parties, which scored a major victory in the recent EU Parliament elections, put forth a series of political and public policy proposals for “*a solid project, dedicated to Romanian society.*” Political proposals included a call to the opposition “*to understand the need for unity and political coherence and offer the Romanian electorate definite options, which prevent or limit political fragmentation.*” The two parties also argued in favor a positive presidential campaign and for a collaboration between opposition parties that would allow them to identify the best candidates that could win the elections in all communes, cities and counties in the country. Among the public policies proposals presented by the two parties are a constitutional reform that would depoliticize institution and turn the “*Fără Penali initiative*” into a constitutional text and bringing the justice system to European standards. Other proposals are an electoral reform that would see local elections held in two rounds; a reform of

central and local administration so as to better serve the needs of Romanian citizens at home and abroad; elimination of inefficient spending and of special pensions; fair labor taxation; making education and healthcare strategic objectives of the Romanian state; a major focus on developing the country's road, railway and airway infrastructure; maximum EU funds absorption; modernization and endowment of the Romanian Army in line with the commitments assumed through the NATO membership; policies to eradicate poverty present in many areas of the country; policies to encourage entrepreneurship; digitalization of public services; investments in agriculture, among others. Ciolos and Barna explained that the final form of the agreement they proposed is subject to negotiations between the opposition parties and other relevant actors that wish to join the Romania United project. The final document would become the governing program proposed to Romanian citizens. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

It seems that political normality and stability are appearing again in the Romanian horizon after Dragnea's imprisonment. Although ruling PSD provided signs of abandoning its previous agenda on controversial justice amendments and control of state's justice system the Venice Commission "slapped" once again the Romanian justice reform. The EU has already sent its satisfaction via the Justice Commissioner who said that triggering of article 7 of the EU Treaty against Romania it is not an option at the moment. Romania is concluding its term on the Presidency of the Council of EU and despite previous

criticism and non-confidence by the EU member states' high officials, the final result could be assessed as positive. The "open battle" between the President Klaus Iohannis and the ruling PSD has divided the state in major institutional issues such as national defense, justice, and security. PSD congress aiming at electing its new leader may bring new political developments with snap elections not excluded. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning has become an advanced base close to Russia. Its strategic importance and role has been upgraded and high level NATO exercises take place in its territory. Consequently, Russia reacts mainly against the NATO military base in Deveselu where anti-missile defense systems have been deployed. Temporarily deployment of THAAD system, a modern high-capability system, may raise tension in the region.



SERBIA: June 26th, Serbian Trade Minister Rasim Ljajic warned that tariffs that Pristina imposed on goods from Serbia could turn into a humanitarian problem. The Minister told the Serbian state TV RTS that tariffs have created millions in losses and have become an internal issue used to score points in Kosovo. He said authorities in Pristina are afraid of losing the points they won when the tariffs were introduced. "You will not revoke tariffs and you are talking about a status solution. That is not possible," Ljajic said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 27th, Serbian Local Government Minister Branko Ruzic told MPs that municipal authorities will be allowed to form their own communal police forces, including plain clothes officers, under the draft law on the communal militia. The

law changes the name of the current Communal Police to Communal Militia because the law on internal affairs reserves the name police for forces under the Internal Affairs Ministry (MUP). The draft law has drawn criticism because it allows the forming of police-like formations in every local community. The Minister was answering questions during a Parliament debate on the draft law which was submitted by the Ministry of State Administration and Local Government. Ruzic said the communal militia is being introduced following assessments that municipal administrations were having significant difficulties in maintaining communal order and ensuring the efficient implementation of laws within the jurisdiction of municipalities. This will allow the municipal authorities to work with the Police and take responsibility for communal order and secure a safe, orderly environment for their residents, the Minister said, adding that the communal militia will assist inspectors and will be allowed to stop vehicles. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 27th, during the intergovernmental meeting in Brussels on Thursday, Serbia opened chapter nine on finances, adding it to the previously opened 16 out of 35 chapters in Belgrade's accession negotiations with the EU that started in 2014, the state RTS reported. Two chapters were closed. Chapter nine regulates the country's financial system. The area is crucially important for all participants in the system since it is expected to lower the interest rates and provide better conditions for borrowing money, the TV said. During the conference, Belgrade signed the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, (IPA) agreement worth 179.1 million euro. Serbia hoped to open at least three chapters this month, but

the latest European Commission (EC) report on the country's progress to the EU membership was not favorable enough. Jadranka Joksimovic, Serbia's Minister of European Integrations said Belgrade should not be unhappy with the opening of just one chapter. *"I expected two, but bearing in mind the unfavorable events in the region, Serbia can be satisfied,"* Joksimovic said. She added that the opening of chapter nine on finances meant the recognition of Serbia's successful economic reforms. George Ciamba, the Foreign Minister of Romania, which holds the EU rotating presidency until June 30th, 2019 has said the speed of closing to the EU will depend on the reforms in the rule of law and basic freedoms, adding the EU expects tangible results in key reforms. Ciamba also said that the EU Ministerial Council stressed the need for Serbia to adjust its foreign policy with that of the bloc and that dialogue with Pristina should resume as soon as possible. Johannes Hahn, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement stressed the importance of chapter nine since it showed Serbia made *"not at all easy"* steps forward in the microeconomic stabilization and economic development. He also said Belgrade should progress in strengthening the rule of law, basic freedoms and the democratic way of governing. Hahn said that since 2007, the EU approved over two billion euro of non-refundable aid to Serbia. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country has entered in a period of fragile political stability due to citizens' reactions against governmental practices regarding human rights, media freedom, and elections transparency. Although protesters insist on

organizing protests, it seems that opposition reactions lose momentum. President Aleksandar Vucic announced that elections (parliamentary and local) will be held on March or April 2020. Opposition said that if its requests will not be fulfilled, elections will be boycotted. It is assessed that Vucic feels more confident that fully controls political situation in Serbia and there is no need for early elections at the moment. Opening of one chapter (chapter 9 on finances) on EU accession negotiations is a positive step (although Belgrade was seeking to open three chapters). Regarding Belgrade – Pristina dialogue there is nothing to be expected in the near future; the whole process has reached a deadlock. Taking into consideration that both sides harden their rhetoric, cancellation of the Paris summit scheduled for July 2019 was not a surprise. Armed Forces are in full alert but without any deployment of units across Serbia – Kosovo border. Serbia strengthens its relations with Russia (and China) seeking stronger support regarding Kosovo case. Security situation is complex and uncertain especially after Police operations in Northern Kosovo (with Serbian majority population) which endangers the possibility of armed violence. None could predict Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation including) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. At the moment, Serbia looks like acting in accordance with the international law aiming at reducing tension in the region. In other words state's leadership is acting in a "reasonable" and "wise" way avoiding mistakes

of the past which have isolated Serbia from the international community. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its armed forces declaring towards all sides that its Armed Forces are the power of the state.



SLOVENIA: June 24th, the President Borut Pahor told the public broadcaster RTV Slovenia that current political stability in Slovenia could be used to push through major projects such as reforms of health and pension systems. He assessed that Slovenia is a safe country but nevertheless he called for enhanced border protection in the light of migrant influx. He said that he is working well with the Prime Minister Marjan Sarec, but he wished for more cooperation with the main political forces in the country. (www.sta.si)

- June 27th, the Government endorsed a proposal for amending the 2017 emergency arbitration bill to extend by another two years fishermen's right to compensation in the face of Croatia's rejecting of the border arbitration award. The right to compensation of holders of permits for commercial fishing expires at the end of this year under the current law. Fishermen receive compensation because commercial fishing in the Slovenian waters is hindered due to Croatia's refusal to acknowledge and implement the border arbitration award. (www.sta.si)

- June 27th, the opposition Left party (Levica) that has pledged to cooperate with the minority Government expressed once again its discontent with the cabinet. Party Head Luka Mecec said the Government is increasingly led to the right. He said the party would like at least four of the planned 13 projects carried out before the

parliamentary summer recess. If this does not happen, the Left will reconsider its cooperation with the cabinet. However, the prime Minister Marjan Sarec assessed relations with the Left party as good. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability, the minority Government of Marjan Sarec has entered in a period of fragile balance due to the Left party announcement that it will re-assessed its support towards the ruling coalition. Left party is the key factor for Government's stability and viability by supporting it in the Parliament. Without the Left's support the Government would be toppled and early elections should be called. At the moment none of the ruling coalition parties wish snap elections, however political developments in mid-July could not be excluded. Sarec has been proved of being flexible in Slovenia's politics so far achieving to balance adequately between different political trends. Looking in the future and next parliamentary elections he seeks to unify political forces belong to the ALDE family against SDS which keeps on being the most powerful political force in the country. The Government has to address several internal social issues (increase of minimum wage, health care, pensions etc). Announcement that 2020 and 2021 state budget will be focused on healthcare and pensions shows that current Government seeks to strengthen social care structures of Slovenia. Border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia remains active with low scale skirmishes not excluded periodically. Slovenia implies that the ongoing border dispute may affect its decision regarding Croatia's

membership candidacy in Schengen Zone. Announcement of the EU Court that Slovenia's complaint against Croatia will be heard on July 8th, 2019 will add another chapter on the two countries dispute. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed military force to support Police tasks. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end.



TURKEY: June 25th,

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Turkey will take delivery of Russia's S-400 missile defense system in July; a deal that has created tensions with the US. "The issue of S-400 is an issue directly related to our sovereignty and we will not backtrack from that. God willing, the delivery of the S-400 will start next month," Erdogan said in a televised speech, restating his unwavering stance. Turkey has plans to buy 100 American-made F-35 fighter jets, and has lucrative contracts to build parts for the jets. The US says the S-400s are not compatible with NATO's systems and are a security threat to its own F-35 program. Washington has threatened to impose sanctions on Ankara and prevent Turkey from purchasing the F-35s. "In order to meet its

security needs, Turkey ... does not need to get permission, let alone bow to pressure,” Erdogan said. Russia has also said it planned to deliver its S-400s to Turkey in July. Erdogan has vowed to use his good relations with US counterpart Donald Trump to defuse tensions when they meet on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan. The US cannot allow Turkey to fly or help produce its F-35 stealth jets if Ankara goes ahead with the purchase of the Russian air defense system, the US envoy to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchison said. *“There will be a disassociation with the F-35 system; we cannot have the F-35 affected or destabilized by having this Russian system in the [NATO] Alliance,”* Hutchison told reporters. The Turkish Foreign Minister said on Monday that Ankara does not fear US sanctions over the S-400 deal. *“Regardless of whatever sanctions there may be, whatever the messages from America, we have bought the S-400,”* Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told reporters in the capital. *“If there is an attack on Turkey tomorrow, we cannot expect NATO to protect us because NATO's capacity would only protect 30% of Turkey's airspace,”* Cavusoglu said. Relations with Washington have deteriorated in recent years over various issues including the S-400 deal, and US support for Syrian Kurdish fighters viewed as “terrorists” by Turkey. Earlier in the month, US officials announced that Washington had halted the training of Turkish pilots on F-35 fighters at an airbase in the US state of Arizona. (www.aljazeera.com)

- June 27th, Istanbul's new Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu has officially taken office on Thursday, before addressing throngs of supporters in front of

the municipality headquarters of Turkey's most-populous city. *“Today is a celebration of democracy,”* he told the cheering crowds, adding *“Nobody has the right to ignore the will of the people.”* Imamoglu thanked all of Istanbul's 16 million residents, as thousands of supporters jamming the streets waved the Turkish national flag, celebrating his landslide victory last Sunday in the second mayoral election in less than three months. None of Turkey's main television channels, seen as cowed by the Government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, carried Imamoglu's speech. *“People of Istanbul taught a lesson to a handful of people who wanted to harm democracy,”* Imamoglu said, adding that he would treat all the citizens of Istanbul as “equals,” regardless of their background or political views. It is the second time this year that Imamoglu of the main opposition Republican People's Party's (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP) has been handed the mandate to become the city's Mayor. His first election victory in March by a slim margin was annulled by the Supreme Electoral Council after controversial claims of rigging by President Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP). Imamoglu was forced to step down after serving 18 days as Mayor. However, he won a decisive win in the rerun, increasing his margin of victory from just 13,000 in March to more than 800,000 against the AKP candidate, former Prime Minister Binali Yildirim. Imamoglu won the polls with 54.21% of votes, Turkey's Supreme Electoral Council (YSK) said, as it announced its preliminary official results. Yildirim stood at 44.99%. The final results are expected to be announced in the coming days after the YSK evaluates objections. Istanbul is seen as Turkey's financial and cultural

capital. The metropolis had been governed by the AKP for the past 15 years. (www.aljazeera.com)



Newly elected Istanbul Mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu
(Photo source: www.ibb.istanbul)

June 29th, Turkey's security forces killed two more Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants during an ongoing security operation in northern Iraq, officials said. Fresh airstrikes raised the toll from 58 to 60 during Operation "Claw" which was launched on May 27th, 2019 to clear the region of PKK terrorists, the National Defense Ministry announced in social media. A total of 112 militants, including those targeted in Operation "Claw" were killed in northern Iraq during the same period, the Ministry added. Operation "Claw" aims to prevent the infiltration of PKK guerillas onto Turkish soil from Hakurk and to spoil the settlement plans of militants in the area. The Hakurk area facilitates militants crossings between Qandil and Iraq's Salahaddin province bordering Syria, where the Syrian People's Protection Units (YPG) control large swathes of territory. Turkey had previously warned the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Iraqi Government about eliminating the PKK from their borders to

maintain Turkey's border security. Despite top officials from both Governments often expressing their discomfort with PKK camps and activities, saying they will not allow militants to attack Turkey from their soil, no serious action has been taken. With no concrete results from Iraq and the KRG efforts, Turkey took matters into its own hands, assuming a hard line against the PKK presence in northern Iraq. Last year, security forces crossed 30 kilometers into northern Iraq. They neutralized at least 200 militants in operations against PKK targets. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkish – US relations keep on deteriorating. The US administration has threatened Turkey with hard economic sanctions including suspension of Turkish participation in all defense projects; such a move would be devastating for Turkish defense companies. Deliveries of Russian air defense system S-400 is expected to begin in mid-July. However, taking into consideration that Turkey is a pivotal country enjoying geopolitical importance and having one of the largest militaries (the 2nd within NATO) it is hard to assess that the US seek a full rift with its NATO ally. On the contrary, there are still open official and unofficial channels of communication working on a mutual accepted compromise. The US needs Turkey and the opposite, especially in a period where Middle East is in turbulence. In this context, President Trump appeared almost regretful for the previous US administration (President Obama era) not allowed Turkey to buy the US Patriot missiles. Economic recession does not help the Turkish President to strengthen his

position internally undermining his political power. Turkey is heading in a major economic crisis. It seems that economy is the major Turkish problem which may be emerged as the “Achilles’ heel” for Erdogan and his political long reign. Municipal elections in Istanbul on June 23rd, 2019 offered a second “bitter defeat” for Erdogan. Imamoglu’s wide victory has sent alarming messages to ruling AKP. It has been proved that control of Istanbul municipality – the biggest Turkish city and trade hub which was under AKP control last 15 years – is always a turning point for Turkish politics. One should note that Erdogan’s political reign has started from Istanbul municipality. Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. EC Progress Report on Turkey was disappointing “freezing” any further development regarding its accession process. Turkish Armed Forces declares its readiness to intervene militarily in Syria, eastern of Euphrates river but the US does not give the “green light” aiming at protecting Syrian Kurds and YPG. Turkey is reinforcing its troops in the Turkish – Syrian borders waiting for the “green light” for establishing a safe zone in Syria but it is doubtful if it will ever get it. There are thoughts of unilateral action within Syria but such a decision may bring Turkish troops against the U.S forces; an unprecedented scenario. Operation “Claw” against PKK in north Iraq continues. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its

doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. In Eastern Mediterranean Turkey escalates tension by sending a 2nd drillship (Yavuz) accompanied by Turkish Navy frigates. Production-sharing deal for the Aphrodite gas reservoir worth over 9 billion dollars over 18 years between Cypriot administration and Noble Energy excluding Turkish Cypriots from any profit it is assessed that it will lead in rapid escalation. Turkey is determined to react even with violence if its interests are harmed. The cost so far, for Turkey, is zero achieving simultaneously to question Cypriot sovereign rights. Although the EU presented a joint declaration condemning Turkish actions and underlying that it will consider appropriate action against Turkey if does not stop an illegal gas drilling bid in Cypriot EEZ, international reactions still are limited in words. In this context, Turkey strengthened its diplomatic efforts to convince international community for its fair rights in the maritime region. It is assessed that Turkey is fully determined to escalate tension in the region including armed violence (if it is necessary) aiming at securing its interests. Taking into consideration that Cyprus and Greece act in coordination and the latter guarantees defense and security of Cyprus it cannot be excluded an accidental or pre-planned “hot incident” in Cyprus or the Aegean Sea.


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NOTE

 Stable situation. No security risk.

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.

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