



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: September 9th, Albanian President Ilir Meta told the Parliamentary Investigative Commission that he canceled the June 30th, 2019 local elections because the opposition was not participating and needed to protect the right of citizens to vote. *“Our Constitution is clear, and the Convention on Human Rights clearly explains the difference between voting and elections,”* Meta said. He presented the Strasbourg Court’s ruling in 2015, where single-candidate elections were considered fictitious, denying citizens the right to vote. The Albanian Parliament, at the request of 55 Deputies, launched a dismissal procedure against Meta for heavy violations of the Constitution. Responding to questions from the parliamentary inquiry Commission, Meta stressed that his decision to postpone the election was the only solution under conditions when both political parties, he said, *“had a conflict agreement.”* He said that the conditions set by the leader of the Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD), Lulzim Basha, not to sit in dialogue with Prime Minister Edi Rama, and the condition of the Head of Government not to negotiate a new election date were unacceptable. Meta said he could not allow any Policeman to be killed by both furious demonstrators and *“the Prime Minister’s often poisonous language.”* The President emphasized that by issuing that decree he defended the right of Albanian citizens to vote and avoided an undemocratic process of voting with one candidate. *“On Saturday before I decided on such an act, after I was informed by the secret service that the Albanian Parliament could be burned, I momentarily acted the best I could It was impossible for me to call a table,*

when the two sides had an agreement on confrontation, it was my duty to avoid consequences that would hurt Albanian citizens,” said President Meta. Asked by the Commission’s leader Ulsi Manja, Meta also said he had warned opposition leader Lulzim Basha that if something like this happened, the consequences would be entirely the opposition’s fault. This is the first time in the history of Albanian pluralism that a President faces an investigative Commission to be questioned on suspicion of violating the Constitution, risking his dismissal. This process can only be concluded with an interpretation and decision by the Constitutional Court, which is still not functional. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- September 10th, Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) Secretary General Gazmend Bardhi reacted after President Ilir Meta’s statements that the Parliament would be burned on June 8th, 2019 if he did not postpone the elections. Speaking to Panorama, Bardhi said there was never such a scenario. *“The Democratic Party and the united opposition have never had a plan to burn down institutions, despite not representing the public interest but the interest of a group of oligarchs and criminals linked to the country’s Prime Minister,”* Bardhi said. He further invited the media to open records preceding the June 30th, 2019 elections and to see how the opposition and the Head of opposition Lulzim Basha denounced Prime Minister Edi Rama’s plans to create destabilization and then blame it on the opposition’s protests. *“The Democratic Party considers the Investigative Commission to dismiss the President as a tool to cover Edi Rama’s illegitimate Government scandals, while members of the Commission,*

personnel of files 184 and 339, are complicit in the crime of stealing local and parliamentary elections,” Bardhi concluded. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- September 13th, the Press Office of the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, reacted after her meeting with the Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama. Her declaration says that the meeting focused on the bilateral relations, but also on European and Balkan region issues. German Parliament (Bundestag) will decide by the end of September that Chancellor Angela Merkel could agree for opening the EU accession negotiations for Albania. (www.top-channel.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

President Ilir Meta was summoned to the Parliamentary Investigative Committee to testify in regard his political actions as Head of the state. Meta defended his decision to cancel local election of June 30th, 2019 relying on Albania's state of emergency due to Government and opposition confrontation which could lead in uncontrolled violence. Ruling PS seeks to oust Meta from power. The country has entered in an endless crisis undermining its democratic function according to the European values and standards. In other words, Albania is under a political and constitutional chaos. 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, but is rather in question if the country will get a positive answer.

Rama's Government collapse and snap elections is a possible scenario, especially after opposition has started to reveal evident for criminal activity of Socialist political executives. 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:

September 11th, Bosnia will not allow any foreign Police force to enter the country anymore even if the price to pay is conflict, Security Minister Dragan Mektic told N1 on Wednesday regarding frequent reports of Croatian Police entering Bosnian territory and pushing migrants back into the country. Thousands have entered Bosnia on their way toward EU countries since the beginning of 2018. The country became a significant transit point after numerous surrounding countries closed their borders. The next stop after Bosnia is mostly the country's

western neighbor, Croatia. Croatian border Police, however, often turn them back. Mektic has repeatedly accused Croatian Police of entering Bosnia illegally and forcefully pushing the migrants back into the country. *“Croatia has completely given up on the Agreement on Readmission and turned to illegal activities. There is proof for that. We will not allow the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina to be breached anymore,”* the Minister said. *“That means that we will stand at our border and will not let any foreign military or Police force enter Bosnia and Herzegovina,”* he said, adding that authorities are obligated to protect the territorial integrity of the country. As for neighboring Serbia, Mektic said that their Police force has not been entering Bosnian territory. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- September 13th, Bosnia was set up as a disfigured state which should never have survived the year 1996 and any attempt to turn it into a civic state is *“devious trickery”* advocated by the main Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) party in the country so it can set up an *“Islamic state,”* the Serb member of Bosnia’s tripartite Presidency Milorad Dodik said at an event in the western town of Drvar where he met with Serbia’s President Aleksander Vucic. Both men participated in a commemoration event for Serbs who lost their lives in the western Krajina region in 1995. The event was part of the *“Days of remembering”* commemorative manifestation for all Serb war victims of the 20th century. Dodik strongly criticized a proposed declaration the main Bosniak party in the country, the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA), is to discuss on Saturday. Declaration

advocates, among other things, for a *“Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina,”* the affirmation of a “Bosnian language” as the *“common identity of all of Bosnia’s citizens,”* a reform of the Police force and setting up a Supreme Court. Dodik said that Serbs will never give up on Republika Srpska (RS); the Serb-dominated semi-autonomous entity within the country. He claimed that the SDA has *“an illusion”* of *“some kind of Islamic state in which they are supposed to be the majority, so they can introduce sharia law,”* adding that the RS will not allow for that to happen. He argued that the announced SDA declaration represents an attack on the Constitution. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- September 15th, Bosnia’s Foreign Affairs Minister said on Sunday that he will raise to issue of Croatia planning to dump its radioactive waste at Bosnia’s border at an upcoming International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) conference. Conference will take place in Vienna, Austria, from Monday to Friday. Bosnia requested in March that Croatia refrains from using Trgovska Gora, an area near the border between the two countries, to store radioactive and nuclear waste and that it finds another adequate area within its own territory to do so. Trgovska Gora is located just north of the border, near the Bosnian town of Novi Grad. Croatia adopted strategic documents at the end of last year which name that area as a potential location for dumping nuclear waste. This information caused concern among residents of Novi Grad, who told N1 in November last year the decision was *“scandalous.”* It has been estimated that dumping the waste at Trgovska Gora would directly endanger the livelihood of several hundreds of thousands of people living around the Una river. *“We will once again clearly*

send a message that we cannot allow for the radioactive waste to be dumped at the Bosnian border,” Crnadak said, adding that all levels of Government in Bosnia are cooperating on the issue. He also announced he would discuss the issue on Monday with the Mayor of Novi Grad, Miroslav Drljaca, as well as with the Ecology Minister of Bosnia’s Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (RS) region, Srebrenka Golic. The Foreign Affairs Minister told reporters at a press conference in Banja Luka that he believes Croatia will be pressured into considering another location to dump its waste, adding that the country has not yet definitely decided what to do. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political instability and uncertainty continues in Bosnia promoting interethnic conflicts and nationalistic rhetoric. A “captured” state with no Government, no state budget, and no growth slims slowly but steadily towards interethnic tension conflict. Establishment of a new Government is a necessity for Bosnia and it is related with state’s viability. Political and ethnic rivalries do not allow formation of a Government since October 7th, 2018 parliamentary elections. Although, the three main parties representing the three constituent entities (Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats); HDZ (Bosnian Croatian party), SDA (Bosnian Muslim or Bosniak party), and SNSD (Bosnian Serbian party) have agreed on forming a Government, have failed to implement it. A strong dispute has broken out regarding Bosnia’s route towards NATO. Bosnian Serbs refuse any progress in the NATO accession process, namely to submit the Annual National Program (ANP) to

NATO. The other two parts; Bosnian Muslims and Croats seek to move forward the whole procedure having the goal to join the Alliance. Failure of establishing a Government raises major concerns of Bosnia’s future national security. 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. 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. Bosnia faces a significant problem of illegal migration which may lead in new disputes between state’s ethnicities. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and other Muslim countries approach the country mainly through “investments” and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests.



BULGARIA: September 11th, we are aware of the investigation by Bulgarian law enforcement into an alleged case of espionage. The US fully supports Bulgaria’s efforts to defend

its sovereignty from malign influence, the statement of the US Embassy in Sofia in connection with the interrogation of the Secretary of the Rossophile Movement Yuriy Borissov and the charges pressed against the Chairman of the movement Nikolay Malinov reads. Several hours before the statement of the US Embassy, Bulgaria's Prosecutor General Sotir Tsatsarov had announced that state's Prosecutor Office is investigating an alleged case of espionage and a crime against the republic, BNR reported. (www.novinite.com)

- September 13th, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov confirmed Bulgaria's desire to become a Schengen member. He said it is important because of the country's reputation. The comment came a week after the Prime Minister announced in Berlin that he was not sure if the time was right. According to Borissov, Bulgaria is doing everything for its border security and no longer needs support, but direct membership. Borissov, however, has reservations whether the lack of border controls will put more pressure on migrants to Bulgaria. Borissov said that he had spoken ironically to his colleagues in Germany. However, Bulgaria really seeks to become a member of the Schengen area. (www.novinite.com)

- September 14th, Bulgarian Prosecutors have charged an official from a non-governmental organization with spying for Russia for allegedly supplying information that aimed to turn the Balkan country away from its pro-Western orientation, TIME has written. Deputy Chief Prosecutor Ivan Geshev said Tuesday that Nikolay Malinov, Chairman of the National Russophile Movement, has been charged "with

putting himself in the service of foreign organizations to work for them as a spy." If he finds guilty, Malinov faces 15 years in prison. He was released on bail but is barred from leaving the country. Geshev said Prosecutors found a document prepared by Malinov outlining "the steps needed to be taken to completely overhaul the geopolitical orientation of Bulgaria away from the West toward Russia." Bulgarian President Rumen Radev called the charges against Malinov "very serious" but added that "indisputable evidence of wrongdoing" is needed. Bulgaria, Moscow's closest ally during the Cold War, has joined NATO and the EU in the last decade but is still almost totally dependent on Russian energy supplies. Charges against Malinov came after a diplomatic quarrel between Sofia and Moscow, which was sparked by an exhibition that the Russian Embassy opened on Monday marking the "liberation of Eastern Europe from Nazism." In an unusually strong statement, Bulgaria's Foreign Ministry advised the Russian Embassy to not support the "dubious" historical claim that Bulgaria was liberated by Soviet forces in 1944. "Soviet Army bayonets brought to the people of Central and Eastern Europe half a century of repression, suppression of civil conscience, deformed economic development, and detachment from developed European countries," the Ministry said. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Bulgaria has engaged (as most Southeastern Europe countries) in a pro-western – pro-Russian rivalry case. Leader of a pro-Russian NGO was accused of spying for Russia. Former communist country and then satellite of Soviet Union has

fully integrated in Euro-Atlantic structures (NATO in 2004 and EU in 2007). However, the country is fully dependant on Russian energy supplies and there is a significant number of Bulgarians who are in favor of Russia. Although the minor partner of the ruling coalition, the United Patriots, faces “structural” problems, the Government is stable. Political parties are entering the pre-electoral period of local elections scheduled for October 27th (first round) and November 3rd, 2019 (second round). Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively. There was last week much rhetoric over Bulgaria's capacity and readiness to join the Schengen Zone. Although the Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov claimed that the country seeks to enter the Zone, it is doubtful if it will get support from the other Schengen members due to current migratory pressures. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). However, military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.



CROATIA: September 11th,

President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic condemned threats to Independent Democratic Serb Party (Samostalna Demokratska Srpska Stranka - SDSS) leader Milorad Pupovac, urging Police to identify the perpetrator. *“I condemn every form of hate speech, and I want the Police investigate and find who is behind the latest incidents and why he did such actions,”* the President said. Zadar

county Police received a call on Monday morning alerting them to offensive graffiti at the entrance to the village of Ceranje Donje, Pupovac's place of birth. The words *“Kill Serbs”* were sprayed over the road sign bearing the village's name and a poster with a photograph of Pupovac and a text accusing him of terror and describing him as a *“Greater Serbian madman”* was displayed nearby. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- September 11th, Minister of Environment and Energy Tomislav Coric said that he is satisfied with the interest shown in a tender for oil and gas exploration in the Dinarides and assessed that possible exploitation would reduce Croatia's energy dependency and fill the state and local budgets. *“This is a proof that hydrocarbon exploitation in Croatia is continuing and that we have started what we communicated in the beginning - that in addition to creating an infrastructure or alternative supply route, we are increasing production in Croatia,”* Coric told reporters outside Government House with regard to the latest concluded tender for hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation in the Dinarides, which received one bid. *“For Croatia, it primarily means our energy dependency will be decreased. On the one hand, that is what we want, and on the other, in the context of future exploration, that means revenue for the local community as well as for Croatia overall, if in the second phase exploration proves to be commercial,”* Coric said. The Croatian Hydrocarbon Agency (CHA) announced on Tuesday that it had received one bid in the latest tender to issue licenses for exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons in the area of the Dinarides. Unofficial sources have said that the sole bidder was the INA oil

company. In January this year the Government decided to launch procurement procedures for the issuance of licenses for exploration and exploitation in the Dinarides, covering an area of 12,134 square kilometers and consisting of four exploration fields in the areas of Karlovac, Lika-Senj, Primorje-Gorski Kotar, Zadar and Split-Dalmatia counties but not including national parks and the areas off the coast and along the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The exploration would be conducted for a period of five years. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- September 15th, the Main Committee of the Croatian Social and Liberal Party (Hrvatska Socijalno-Liberalna Stranka - HSLS), a junior partner in the ruling coalition turned down the proposal of the party leader Darinko Kosor to leave the coalition at the state level. After the party leadership's meeting in the coastal town of Novi Vinodoksi, Kosor said that the Main Committee had turned down his proposal with the sole explanation it would not be good if this party of liberal and civic orientation leaves the coalition due to the topic concerning ethnic minorities. Kosor said last Wednesday that the Independent Democratic Serb Party (Samostalna Demokratska Srpska Stranka - SDSS) leader Milorad Pupovac fed right wingers with his policy and comments as well as all who caused ethnically motivated incidents, that he did not retract any of his recent statements, and that the HSLS would decide on Sunday whether to remain in the ruling coalition. Kosor posted on social media "Yes to the protection of Serbs, Croatian citizens from violence in Croatia. No to the SDSS lecturing democratic Croatia." Speaking to Hina, Kosor said that if nothing changes in the meantime, his

party would decide on Sunday whether to leave the coalition. The HSLS caucus comprises Kosor, two MPs from the Croatian Christian Democratic Party (Hrvatska Demokršćanska Stranka - HDS) and one MP from the regional Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja (Hrvatski Demokratski Savez Slavonije i Baranje - HDSSB) party. Kosor said each party would decide whether to stay in the ruling coalition. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The country enjoys political stability and support from EU towards its Eurozone goal. Croatia implements a hard-line foreign policy with its neighboring countries maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. However, a series of violent and verbal attacks against Croat Serbs raises questions over smooth coexistence of ethnic communities in Croatia. It should be noted that state institutions act decisively in resolving these cases sending a strong message that such attacks are not tolerated in Croatian society. Unofficial sources claim that the country has fulfilled all Schengen zone criteria and it is a matter of time (during September 2019) to officially announced. However, the matter may become a new field of confrontation with Slovenia due to the Piran Bay border dispute. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.



CYPRUS: September 10th, Cyprus and Greece agreed on a joint course of action to deal with illegal activities by Turkey in the island's Exclusive Economic Zone, and plans to open the fenced-off area of Varosha to development. According to a joint statement following their meeting in Athens, President Nicos Anastasiades and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis expressed the common position that Turkey should end these actions and contribute to the creation of a suitable climate for Cyprus talks. Both also expressed their willingness to work with the UN *“to relaunch substantive negotiations on the overall settlement of the Cyprus issue.”* They also referred to the “extreme intransigence” shown by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu during his visit to the north of the island on Monday. Cavusoglu stoked tensions by warning Greek Cypriots to accept a joint gas committee, insisting there would be no talks without advance Turkish Cypriot political equality, disparaging President Nicos Anastasiades, and announcing the opening of a Turkish consulate in Famagusta. On Anastasiades' arrival in Athens, Mitsotakis said Greece remains steadfast in its efforts to resolve the Cyprus problem and is standing by Cyprus in defense of its rights. Anastasiades thanked Mitsotakis for Greece's positions and for supporting the need to finally find a solution to the Cyprus problem. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- September 14th, Cyprus fired back against Turkey on Saturday, saying if anyone is threatening peace in the area it is Ankara, after President Tayyip Erdogan accused the Greek Cypriots of refusing to share the wealth of natural

gas with the Turkish Cypriots. *“If someone is threatening the peace it is Turkey, who is infringing on the EEZ and Cyprus' territorial waters with its Government research vessels and drillships, accompanied by battleships,”* Government spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said. He added that Cyprus is operating within international law and that exploitation of natural gas will also be done on behalf of the Turkish Cypriots. Commenting on Cyprus negotiations, Erdogan said he had been at talks back in 2004 with the then UN Secretary General Kofi Anan in Burgenstock, where they made an agreement. Commenting on Erdogan's statements regarding Turkey's research, Prodromou said the Turkish President's statements were baseless. Regarding the sharing of wealth, the Government Spokesman added that President Nicos Anastasiades has already made a proposal to Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci on sharing the gains of the finding in EEZ. After the failure of the referendum to back the solution reached in 2004, Erdogan said the EU inducted Cyprus and left the north out. However, Prodromou said that thousands of Turkish Cypriots are also EU citizens because they have documents of the Republic of Cyprus as is their right. Regarding energy, the Turkish President said there are areas around Cyprus where Turkey is researching and there are areas to the south where *“south Cyprus”* is researching. He added that international law states, whatever is produced from this research or taken out of the sea must be shared. Asked if there is a chance for cooperation, Erdogan said anything could happen. He said there are currently two drillships in Cyprus' waters and a third could be on its way. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- September 15th, Turkey is attempting to scupper any chance of negotiations being resumed, the Government said on Sunday. Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said Ankara is trying to prevent an agreement between the leaders of the two sides on terms of reference that would see talks resume under UN auspices. He was responding to comments by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in an interview published on Sunday in Kathimerini where he repeated comments he made in Cyprus during his visit to the north last Monday as regards the negotiations and the fenced-off town of Varosha. In the interview, Cavusoglu called for an informal five-party meeting with the two sides and the guarantor powers to define what will be negotiated, create a framework, and go to negotiations “*focused on outcome.*” He also repeated that Varosha would be opened. “*The plan for the city will be made public after the necessary processes are done,*” he said. Cavusoglu had visited Varosha last Monday with Turkish Cypriot “*Foreign Minister*” Kudret Ozersay. The Turkish Foreign Minister also said Ankara would continue drilling in and around Cyprus “*until a common solution to the issue is found.*” Prodromou responded saying “*Obviously Turkey is intervening at the moment to prevent the agreement between the President of the Republic and the Turkish Cypriot leader which appeared to be possible, to conclude the terms of reference.*” UN envoy Jane Holl Lute spent six days earlier this month shuttling between the two leaders to agree on the terms. A deal appeared to be close until an obstacle arose from the Turkish side as regards the inclusion of political equality for the Turkish Cypriots, following a phone call between Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci and

Ankara. From then on and despite three more rounds of meetings with Lute, the terms could not be agreed. Cavusoglu, during his visit, said political equality would have to be agreed in advance before any new talks could come about. “*Turkey has been trying to prevent the resumption of negotiations because it wants to avoid and disable the Guterres framework and in particular the provisions of the framework and the parameters for the abolition of guarantees and the withdrawal of the occupying army,*” said Prodromou. “*In the interim, it raises the claim for the abolition of the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus on the pretext of natural gas while using as blackmail the threat of colonization of the city of Famagusta, which it has held captive and hostage for 45 years in a state of desolation,*” he added. Prodromou said that in the words of President Nicos Anastasiades on Saturday night, “*we will use all diplomatic and political means at our disposal to prevent the colonization of Varosha and claim the continuation of the UN Secretary-General’s initiative to relaunch negotiations.*” (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

According to Cyprus, Turkey sets obstacles in the efforts of restarting negotiations on Cypriot question. It is estimated that there are little chances of an agreement for relaunching negotiation talks. The ongoing crisis with Turkish invasion of drillship Fatih (while the second one Yavuz has also started drilling activity off Karpasia, according to Turkey) within its EEZ continues. Fatih is there for almost four months, while Turkish administration declares that offshore drilling will continue until an agreement

between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities will be reached regarding exploration and exploitation of natural gas. In this context, Turkey issued a new NAVTEX until November 3rd, 2019 showing that it intends to maintain tension in coming autumn. Turkey's objective goal is to force (by the presence and activity of drillships) Cyprus to compromise reaching an agreement with the occupied north part. Despite international calls to Turkey for abandoning its plans of violating the Cypriot EEZ and its sovereign rights, Turkish actions remain "unanswered." Not only that, but Turkey seeks to escalate tension by sending a third drillship; the "Oruc Reis". With three drillships in the region and Turkish Navy ships protecting them autumn is expected to be "hot". Cyprus is trapped failing to 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. The EU prepared a draft with sanctions against Turkey but the latter rejected them claiming that it will continue its activity. 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. 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. In this context, next trilateral meeting between Cyprus, Egypt, and Greece will take place on October 8th, 2019 in Egypt. 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. 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. A "hot" incident cannot be excluded during autumn.



GREECE: September 12th, the Hellenic Navy (HN) on Thursday denied a press report claiming that anti-personnel landmines were stolen along with other military equipment from its base on the island of Leros on Monday, saying it does not have any such weapons in stock. "Reports...are untrue and do not correspond to reality," HN said in a press release, adding that it does not possess in its arsenal material that has been banned by international treaties and agreements. Greek newspaper Estia reported on Thursday that 140 APLs were among the weapons taken from the base on Monday. Greece is a signatory of the 1999 Ottawa Convention or Mine Ban Treaty, which seeks to end their use worldwide. Its APLs should have been destroyed by March 2008. The paper also claims that Greece still has 400,000 APLs in military warehouses. Both the Navy and Greek

Police's Counterterrorism Unit launched investigations on Tuesday after the former issued a statement saying that anti-tank missiles, ammunition and grenades were found to be missing from the island's base following a routine inspection on Monday afternoon. Counterterrorism officers were on the island within hours of the Navy's announcement. Sources at the Police and the country's Armed Forces suggest that suspicions are focusing on two guards who had access to the area where the equipment was stored. The storage area is protected by an electronic security system for which both guards had the passcode, Kathimerini understands. A third individual, a member of the Hellenic Navy's Underwater Demolition Squad, is also believed to have had access, so he is also a potential suspect. However, authorities are not ruling out the possibility of the passcode having been leaked to someone else. It is thought that the motive for the removal of the equipment could be arms smuggling. However, authorities have not yet ruled out two other possible scenarios – that the theft was the work of a domestic guerrilla group or that of a foreign-based group or agency. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- September 13th, a total of 3,469 migrants arrived at Greece's northern Aegean islands from the start of September till Friday morning, according to figures published by the region's General Police Directorate. Breaking down the numbers, 2,078 foreign nationals arrived on Lesbos, 589 on Chios and 802 on Samos since September 1st, 2019. In August, arrivals on the islands of the north Aegean totaled 5,813, of which 3,866 on Lesbos, 685 on Chios and 1,262 on Samos. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- September 14th, in what is seen as an effort to ratchet up pressure on Athens, Ankara issued a new navigational telex (NAVTEX) on Friday reserving an area stretching from west of the southeastern Aegean island of Kastellorizo to south of Rhodes for “oceanographic and climate” research by its Bilim-2 vessel until September 16th, 2019. A second Turkish NAVTEX reserved the same area for naval exercises on September 17th, 2019. For its part, Athens has not remained idle in the face of Turkish movements in the area in recent two months. According to sources, it has already issued a submarine notice (SUBNOTE) reserving a large area stretching from south of Kastellorizo to within Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone and has already begun exercises. The SUBNOTE expires in mid-October. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■:

The Government focuses on facilitating country's growth restoring Greece's country profile. “Novarty's” case may become source of political tension in the coming months, especially if the Parliament will decide to establish an investigative committee on former Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and former Deputy Justice Minister Demetrios Papangelopoulos regarding their role in intervening and influencing Justice investigation. Arrivals of migrants from Turkey continue in increased rates. Control of migrant flows coming from Turkey is a critical point for Greek national security and consequently EU's security. Greek – Turkish relations are in a critical point not only due to Turkey's decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills, but also

because Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial and maritime sovereign rights. Greece is concerned due to Turkish intention to search for hydrocarbons within its EEZ near to Kastelorizo region. The critical question is “how Greece would react if a Turkish drillship would appear in its territorial waters.” It should be noted that situation may be escalated rapidly especially after the end of the touristic season (end of September – mid October). In this context, Turkey has issued a NAVTEX for September 16th, 2019 eastern of Rhodes island and northeast of Crete island not including Megisti complex islands (Kastellorizo) for oceanographic and climate research. Moreover, Turkey has issued a NAVTEX for September 17th, 2019 in the same area for Turkish Navy exercise. Greece reaction was a SUBNOTE including the Turkish NAVTEX area and including Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone. 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 massively. 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. 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. Currently, Greece is in talks with France for purchasing two advanced frigates BELHARA. Taking into consideration the ongoing

“NAVTEX war” in Southeastern Aegean and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ, security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey.



KOSOVO: September 10th, a Kosovo Serb, member of Kosovo’s Central Election Commission (CIK) Stevan Veselinovic left a CIK session after it decided that all IDs of the voters in the early parliamentary elections on October 6th, 2019 had to be issued by Pristina, the Beta news agency reported on Tuesday. Veselinovic said that such a move violated the law and electoral rules which CIK should implement. “The decision violets Election Law’s article 90 and Election Rules article 16 which stipulate that during the vote, all valid IDs can be used except the drivers’ licenses which must be issued in Kosovo,” he added. He recalled the law was respected during all previous elections and described the new decision as “political and illegal,” and “directed against Kosovo’s Serbs to prevent as many of them as possible to vote and choose their representatives.” “I reiterate that it is illegal for the CIK to bring decisions during the election process which violate the law, disabling the voting right to the citizens of Serb nationality,” Veselinovic said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 11th, newly appointed US Special Representative for the Western Balkans, Matthew Palmer, is expected to visit Kosovo, US Embassy in Pristina confirmed to Gazeta Express. Date and agenda of his visit are yet to be confirmed. This would be Palmer’s first visit to Kosovo in his capacity as US Special Envoy for Balkans. According to the US Department of State, Palmer will lead efforts to strengthen US diplomatic

engagement in support of peace, stability, and prosperity in the region and focus on integration of the Western Balkan countries into Western institutions. Palmer said that one of the key points of his agenda is also Pristina - Belgrade dialogue. In an interview with Montenegro's state broadcaster RTCG, Palmer expressed his optimism that an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia can be achieved. He also said earlier that mutual recognition would be ideal for solving Kosovo - Serbia problems adding that the US will play its role as a partner in order to convince both parties resume the dialogue. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- September 11th, Kosovo's outgoing Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said on Wednesday that no one in the US wants to see Kosovo divided but got the wrong suggestions from the Western Balkans. He told a news conference that those wrong suggestions came not only from the Serbian side but also from Kosovo, the Klan Kosova TV station said. "There are two worlds – Serbia with its allies working against us and our world which restrains Serbia. We have avoided a division of Kosovo and any weakening of Kosovo," he said. "I think mistakes regarding the Balkans and Kosovo happened here in the Balkans, not in Washington," Haradinaj said, adding that the wrong suggestions "understandably came from Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic because his state interest lies in the division of Kosovo" as well as others. "Kosovo border separates the influence of America and Russia and we are on the front line. I am convinced that America is always with Kosovo," he said. Haradinaj said that the 100% tariffs on

goods from Serbia will be revoked by mutual recognition. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Pre-electoral campaign is in progress without major problems. Central Election Committee (CIK) decided to accept only ID documents issued by Kosovo authorities provoking strong reactions from Kosovo Serbs. It is obvious that such decision targets Serb minority excluding voters who carry documents issued by Serbian authorities. International community (US, EU) has called for fair elections, while the EU will send monitors for the election day. Under these circumstances dialogue with Serbia comes in second priority. International community namely the US and EU will repeat their efforts towards restarting dialogue between the two parties after elections, assessing the new Kosovo political reality. Restart of bilateral negotiations could not be expected before December 2019 or beginning of 2020. The newly appointed US envoy on Western Balkans Matthew Palmer plans to visit Kosovo in the coming period in an effort to restart Pristina – Belgrade dialogue. However, Kosovo insists on maintaining high level of tension with Serbia due to a series of provocative actions; ban of Serbian officials to enter north Kosovo populated mostly by Serbs, Police operation in the north arresting Serbs, 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 undermining any possibility of negotiations with Serbia. 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. Kosovo unresolved status, political instability, corruption, and organized crime are not encouraging factors for its future within European community. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. The possibility of Kosovo Army presence in the north it is assessed of high security risk which may lead in armed violence.



MOLDOVA: September 11th, MP Lilian Carp of the parliamentary pro-European political bloc ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnităte și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate – PAS)] believes that the Transnistrian region has lately become the source of a constant threat to Moldova's economy and security. Carp said on the local television last night that those who violate the law use the Transnistrian region to evade responsibility and to flee from Moldova. *"We know the names of a multitude of former Moldovan officials who broke the law and fled through the Transnistrian region first to Ukraine and then to Romania or Russia or elsewhere,"* he claimed. In his belief, such a practice must be stopped, bearing in mind that Moldova and Ukraine constantly strengthen their joint control of the common border, in particular the just modernized border-crossing station of Palanca-Mayaki-Udobnoe. Victoria Bucataru, the Prime Ministerial Security Adviser, said in the TV program that struggle against corruption and

against illicit schemes shall be unfolded in all corners of the republic. *"We are determined to combat corruption and smuggling, including indeed the smuggling that is run through the Transnistrian region, which is a very serious problem. And in this, we will need the support of our Ukrainian partners because this is our common cause, and success in it depends of joint efforts,"* the official stated. (www.infotag.md)

- September 12th, Moldova's Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Nicolae Popescu said he regards his first visit to Moldova as the beginning of a joint work to normalize relations between Moldova and Russia. Popescu said at his joint news conference with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov that last few years were complicated for bilateral relationship, and it was a period of certain misunderstandings and of diverging approaches to handling problems that kept mounting. *"Therefore, relations with the Russian Federation is one of the important-most priorities for the new Moldovan Government, so in our today's dialogue we highlighted the importance of restoring trade and economic relations, whose current shape does not correspond to our interests or our possibilities,"* said the Moldovan Foreign Minister. Popescu emphasized the need for removing all existing impediments to Moldovan goods on their way to the Russian market, bearing in mind and proceeding from both countries' participation in the free trade zone of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In his opinion, the CIS free trade zone and the DCFTA [Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, the essential-most component of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement] do not contradict to one

another. *“A special attention should be attached to the sensitive question of Transnistrian conflict settlement. We have pointed out the important role played by Russia in this job, along with other international mediators and observers taking part in the 5+2 negotiation process. Chisinau counts on Moscow's assistance in determining a lasting political solution to the Transnistrian question to be based on the respect for the Republic of Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity,”* Popescu said. He stressed that the Russian military presence in the Transnistrian region contradicts to the Republic of Moldova's neutral status fixed in the Constitution, and that the Russian troop withdrawal is remaining one of Moldova's chief external political priorities. Answering journalists' question that President Igor Dodon stands allegedly against further integration with the EU and how this can harmonize with the Transnistrian settlement strategy, Popescu said that the new Moldovan parliamentary majority, consisting of the Party of Socialists and political bloc ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate – PAS)], is based on the idea of continuing the implementation of the EU - Moldova Association Agreement and the DCFTA. *“The same concerns the continuation of realization of the Moldova - NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan [IPAP], but all this is based on the principle of Moldova's neutrality. One of our new Government's wishes is to normalize relations with Russia. But all this has no relation to how we will be waging the Transnistrian conflict settlement process. We are actively looking for ways to resolving this problem, and want to*

achieve concrete results in this,” Popescu said. (www.infotag.md)

- September 13th, following the change of Government in June 2019, the Republic of Moldova has taken decisive steps to implement key reforms to meet deterioration of democratic standards and the rule of law. The conclusion is set in a report published on September 12th, 2019 by the EU, which aims to implement the commitments under the EU - Moldova Association Agreement during the past year. The report reveals that while the reforms in the economic and banking sector advanced during 2018, fundamental structural reforms of the judiciary, the fight against corruption, the criminal investigation of banking fraud in 2014 and the assurance of media plurality lagged behind. The EU noted that the new Government, sworn in June 2019, has committed to the implementation of the Association Agreement with Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, fully respecting its key principles. A press release reads that the Moldovan Government adopted a lot of programs focused on the most urgent reforms and has taken significant steps, especially the electoral framework, fight against corruption and de-politicization of state institutions. In response, the Commission resumed budget support and signed three crucial funding agreements worth about 55 million euro. *“The new Government of the Republic of Moldova has launched an important reform plan to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. We expect authorities to respect their commitments and implement the EU - Moldova Agreement for the benefit of citizens. We, the EU, are ready to continue to support this endeavor,”* EU High

Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini said. European Commissioner for Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn added that payments for budget support were resumed in July 2019 and financing agreements for sustainable local development and the rule of law were signed with the Moldovan Government. Hahn said the EU is ready to continue to increase financial support for the country if reforms continue. Following the non-transparent invalidation of the local elections in Chisinau in June 2018, the EU and other international actors have noticed a decline in the rule of law and the state of democracy. As a result, the EU decided in 2018 to put on hold payments for budget support and macro-financial assistance, as well as recalibrate and reduce additional financial support. The report was presented before the annual EU - Moldova Association Council, due in Brussels on September 30th, 2019. (www.moldpres.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The EU released a report on Moldova, claiming that the country has made progress in implementing major reforms regarding rule of law and democratic standards. Consequently, the EU promises increase of financial aid if reforms continue. The country enjoys political stability and relationship between pro-russian PSRM and pro-western ACUM block currently is working. Transnistria is a case which concerns Moldova and withdrawal of Russian troops is a priority for the Government. It should be noted that Russia closely follows political developments in Moldova

and it will not allow any overcome of its “red lines” such as Moldova’s integration in NATO or EU. Moldova is considered as a pivotal country for Russian national security. The “Transnistrian case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: September 10th, a caretaker Government is the only real tool for control and fair elections; everything else is improvisation, primarily to the detriment of the opposition, said Vladimir Dobricanin, member of the Management Team of the United Montenegro (UCG). He urged opposition to withdraw from the Assembly's Comprehensive Electoral Legislation Reform Committee. *“We should urgently offer the Caretaker Government Agreement to the representatives of the authorities - if they refuse, we should go out to the streets and boycott all elections. It would unite us, everything else causes rifts among us,”* Dobricanin said. The UCG, as he points out, reiterated that it is priority to get an agreement on a caretaker Government and then deal with the rest. *“Obviously, the DPS continuously agrees to everything, to all forms and formats of work in the Parliamentary Committee, but it just does not agree to the caretaker Government – the reason should be clear to everyone,”* Dobricanin stated. (www.rtcg.me)

- September 15th, the Standard & Poor’s rating agency (S&P) has published a new report on Montenegro and confirmed the country’s previous rating of ‘B+/B’ with stable outlook, the Ministry of Finance stated. According to the Ministry, analysts of S&P confirmed Montenegro’s stable outlook, noting that the country’s developing

policy is heading in the right direction. “By analyzing trends in the Montenegrin economy, the Standard & Poor’s rating agency pointed out to the significant outcomes achieved in the area of tourism and energy, as well as a significant foreign direct investment flow,” the Ministry of Finance said in a statement. Foreign investment greatly contributed to the country’s stable outlook, the Ministry added. “The S&P projections say it [foreign investment] will amount to around 10% of GDP at the annual level for the next four years, mostly focused on the sector of real estate, hotel industry and hospitality, as well as the energy sector,” the Ministry announced. (www.cdm.me)

- September 15th, protests organized by the “Odupri se 97000“ (“Resist 97000”) movement will continue on September 30th, 2019 announced Dzermal Perovic, one of the leaders of the movement. According to him, there will be many supporters having in mind all the new affairs that happened recently. “We will continue with the protests on September 30th. As for the concept, nothing will change, that is, we plan to stage peaceful protests against the government, and I am sure many people would come as there were some other affairs in the country after the ‘Envelope affair’,” Perovic said. In an interview for Vijesti TV he said their key request would be to bring down the existing system. “Our Agreement for Future includes all key aspects, as well as the model which guarantees a serious Government.” (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Opposition appears divided in Montenegro strengthening ruling DPS’s power. 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 into 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. The Government promotes state’s political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment. Economic stability was confirmed last week by the Standard & Poor’s rating agency (S&P). 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. Russian influence continues to be considered as a “threat” against state’s national security and NATO plans to send special units to address “hybrid threats.” In other words, the west still is concerned for Russian interference in Montenegro’s domestic issues.



NORTH MACEDONIA:

September 11th, fate of the Special Prosecutor’s Office (SPO) and the cases opened by this Prosecution still remain uncertain. Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijal-demokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) and Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) leaders Zoran Zaev and Hristijan

Mickoski following six-hour long talks failed to find a solution to the Law on Public Prosecutor's Office, which should resolve the future status of the Special Prosecutor's Office. The key difference between the two teams remains the fate of SPO cases. Sources of the Government's negotiating team said that VMRO-DPMNE insisted SPO cases opened after June 30th, 2017 to be abolished with the law. The Government suggested setting up a new Prosecution Office for high-level corruption headed by a public Prosecutor nominated by the opposition, backed by 61 lawmakers, who will be able to start proceedings if it is found that there is crime in the Government as well. Opposition also demanded cases opened by SPO in first 18 months to be transferred to new Office, demanding the possibility of expire, delay and disable their Court endings. The SPO's term expires on September 15th, 2019. The new public Prosecution law which is underway in Parliament should regulate the future status of SPO, but differences over the bill still remain between the Government and opposition. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- September 12th, the Czech Parliament ratified Thursday North Macedonia's NATO accession protocol. North Macedonia's Prime Minister Zoran Zaev attended the parliamentary session. On February 6th, 2019 member states signed the protocol on the accession of North Macedonia to NATO. Following its ratification by all 29 states, North Macedonia will officially become a full-fledged member of NATO. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- September 15th, Katica Janeva, who is now in detention as the third suspect in the "Racket" case, has been dismissed from her post at the helm of the Special Prosecutor's Office. The remaining

Special Prosecutors' status will be decided by the Council of Public Prosecutors on Monday. The council called a special session on Saturday evening to accept the dismissal after Parliament earlier in the day had voted unanimously to dismiss Janeva. Council Chairman Aco Kolevski told the press Janeva was unanimously dismissed for "illegal, unprofessional, and unethical conduct" and her dismissal was effective immediately. Janeva had resigned on July 15th, 2019 immediately after the Racket scandal broke and the case's main suspects Bojan Jovanovski and Zoran Mileski were arrested. (www.nezavisen.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■:

North Macedonia's politics are shaken by a series of corruption and extortion scandals which undermines not only country's political stability, but also its European perspective. Fancy names such as "Extortion", "Empire", "Racket", "Titanic", "Monster" are nothing more than scandals involving politicians, businessmen, criminals, and judicial servants demonstrating that corruption, absence of rule of law and non transparency dominate in state's function. There are several European voices calling North Macedonia to focus on judicial reforms, rule of law, and fight against corruption in order to achieve a positive result in coming October regarding the opening of accession talks with the EU. Major EU countries such as France appear concerned over a positive signal under these circumstances. However, it is assessed that North Macedonia will finally get a date of opening accession negotiations with the EU for several reasons related to geopolitics, EU credibility, and

Russian influence in the region. Zaev has strongly promoted his plan for a well-governed state where rule of law and a functional justice system would dominate. He actually based his pre-electoral campaign against VMRO-DPMNE on such rhetoric. Consequently, it is rather contradictory to watch ruling SDSM politicians and state's servants to be involved in scandals and illegal activities. Implementation of justice reform and transparent investigation of the "Racket" scandal which touches governmental officials are two "key" points for a successful signal of the EU. It is assessed that no matter what the EU will decide on North Macedonia's accession talks, snap elections will be called after the EU decision; either under positive conditions for Zaev (in case the country gets a date), or under negative conditions (North Macedonia will not get a date for accession talks with the EU).



ROMANIA: September 9th, leaders of Romanian opposition parties Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR) and Freedom, Unity and Solidarity Party (Partidul Libertății, Unității și Solidarității - PLUS), Dan Barna and Dacian Cioloș, sent a proposal to President Klaus Iohannis and the other opposition parties to make a pact for organizing early parliamentary elections next year, at the same time with the elections for the local administration. The two parties said this is the only way to get Romania out of the political and moral crisis caused by the ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD). The elections for the local administration are scheduled to take place on June 6th, 2020, while the parliamentary elections will be held in

December 2020. USR and PLUS hope to convince all the other parties represented in Romania's Parliament to join their initiative, including PRO Romania (PRO Romania - PRO), the party of former PSD Prime Minister Victor Ponta, and Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE), PSD's former junior coalition partner. The pact proposed by Dan Barna and Dacian Cioloș provides that all opposition parties signing it commit to voting a no-confidence motion against the PSD Government led by Viorica Dancila. Then, they propose that President Klaus Iohannis or whoever will be President after the elections in November this year dissolves the Parliament by March 6th, 2020 at the latest, so that early elections can be organized on June 6th, 2020. (www.romania-insider.com)

- September 10th, Prime Minister Viorica Dancila has announced the Cabinet will go in Parliament next week for a vote of confidence adding she has not decided yet if the vote will be for the Government restructuring or for a simple reshuffle. She also said that, in case of a restructuring, only 19 Ministries will remain; so ten portfolios less than the current structure. In his turn, Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) Secretary General, Mihai Fifor has stated that the Government will ask for the Parliament's vote of confidence, but if it is not going to get it, the Executive will come up with another version "*until we convince the Parliament that the country must be yet governed.*" However, Fifor stressed that the vote in Parliament will be favorable and it will prove the opposition's incapacity to gather a majority and to come up with a ruling alternative. On the other side, a

former Social Democrat, Victor Ponta, now PRO Romania (PRO Romania - PRO) Chairman has announced his party will vote the censure motion, but will take part only in a center-left Government. Ponta slammed Prime Minister Dancila again, saying she is “*the puppet of Liviu Dragnea and of the barons*” and that she is “*willing to destroy social democracy for some trivial interests.*” (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- September 13th, Romania’s President Klaus Iohannis in a public speech on September 12th, 2019 rejected all Minister candidates submitted by Prime Minister Viorica Dancila, stressing that no Minister would be appointed without prior endorsement from the Parliament. “*Under the current circumstances, the Constitution requires a vote in the Parliament,*” Iohannis stressed, mentioning that he was informed about the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE), the junior ruling party, having pulled out of the ruling coalition at the end of August, G4media.ro reported. Dancila on September 11th, 2019 submitted to President Iohannis six Minister candidates, three of whom are still ALDE members at that time, a detail that was interpreted by Dancila as preserving the political structure of the ruling coalition. In the meantime, ALDE President Calin Popescu Tariceanu informed both Dancila and Iohannis that the three would be expelled from the party, with the effect of the Government changing its political structure therefore needing a vote in Parliament. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Romania faces political instability since the minor partner of the ruling coalition ALDE withdrew its support from the Government. The country is moving towards early parliamentary elections estimated to be held on June 2020. Prime Minister Viorica Dancila uses several maneuvers to maintain parliamentary majority overcoming obstacles by President Klaus Iohannis and opposition. Iohannis refuses to nominate new Ministers aiming to force Dancila to ask ratification from the Parliament (which is doubtful if she controls it). On the other hand, Dancila keeps proposing as new Ministers, ALDE’s MPs in an effort to change parliamentary balance in favor of ruling PSD. Finally, PNL initiative to file a censure motion against the Government is not certain will be backed by the other opposition parties due to their own interests and political calculations. Even if PSD Government achieve to continue as a minority one it will not a functional Government blocking any major reform in the country. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries perceiving it as a threat against its national security. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: September 10th, Special US Envoy for the Western Balkan Matthew Palmer stated that he is convinced that agreement between Belgrade and Pristina can be reached He added that US would back the Government in Pristina as it is devoted to dialogue, while Russian

wants the region based on disorder and mistrust. *“One of our primary goals is to support the formation of Kosovo Government that is devoted to dialogue, which means suspending tariffs and returning to the negotiations table,”* he said in an interview for RTCG. He said that negotiations should be serious, resulting in a comprehensive agreement on normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. *“It would be ideal if it could be done based on mutual recognition. Once when both sides return to negotiations table, we would be partners in quest for the agreement that would be acceptable to all sides, permanent and fair, that would help Serbia on its EU path,”* Palmer said. He added that the whole region depends on this issue, saying that he does not believe that disputes between Belgrade and Pristina could affect the European path of other countries. Palmer said that *“Russians are in force in the Western Balkans”* and that the US has a fundamentally different perspective of the region compared to Russia. *“We see the Western Balkans as a member of a family of Western countries, integrated in Euro-Atlantic institutions, as countries that cooperate on the basis of rules and norms. The Russians have indicated that they want a region based on disorder and mistrust. I think we saw it most clearly in Montenegro when the Russians supported the 2016 coup, which was an outrageous move to prevent Montenegro from joining NATO and the West,”* he said. Asked if he thought it was possible for something like that to happen again, Palmer said he had no information that could lead him to believe that something like that could happen again. *“However, I do not think that the Russians had finished with putting efforts to cause problems in Montenegro and in the*

Western Balkans, and we see that throughout the region,” Palmer concluded. (www.b92.net)

- September 14th, the Democratic Party (Demokratska Stranka – DS) has decided that it will not participate in the election but will continue to actively and permanently fight for creating conditions for free and fair elections, as well as to communicate with the European Parliament, international organizations and representatives in the fight for democratic electoral conditions. *“Since there are no elementary conditions for free and fair elections, the Government did not meet any of the joint opposition demands and did not accept any of the proposals by a group of independent experts, nor did it show any sincere intention for substantive changes to the circumstances in which elections are impossible, the Democratic Party will not participate in the elections,”* the main Committee of the party decided. Before the vote, party leader Zoran Lutovac said at a session of the party's main Committee that the only response to the regime's behavior is a boycott. He said that the regime uses *“an intense media campaign”* which often turns into a *“usurpation of institutions and suspension of rights”* and leaves no room for any other response than a boycott. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 15th, Serbia does not want to have hostile relations with the US, but wants to work on improving them so they are as good they used to be, President Aleksandar Vucic said at an event marking WWII Operation *“Halyard”* in the central village of Pranjani on Sunday. Vucic commented on the dismissal of US National Security Advisor John Bolton, saying that he spoke to him over the phone and that *“Serbs*

appreciate his stance on the issue of Kosovo.”
The President said he is surprised by the reactions of some in Serbia who welcomed Bolton’s dismissal. He said Serbia will continue cooperating and seeking common ground with the US and Kosovo Albanians. (rs.www.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Two opposition parties announced that they would boycott coming parliamentary elections, while the other ones will assess situation and will decide in the near future. Ruling SNS and President Alexander Vucic should work harder on mutual compromise with opposition if they seek to conduct valid and fair elections. It is assessed that a potential boycott of the elections by the opposition will affect Serbia’s political stability, economic growth, and its European process. Serbia advocates equal friendly relations with the US, EU, Russia, and China. However, it is a common “secret” that it is considered by the west as a close “friend and ally” of Russia. Regarding Belgrade – Pristina dialogue there is nothing to be expected in the near future; the whole process has reached a deadlock since Kosovo has called for early parliamentary elections on October 6th, 2019, and Serbia is preparing for elections on spring 2020. Security situation is complex and uncertain. 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. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring

towards all sides that they are the power of the state.



SLOVENIA: September 10th, economic relations topped the agenda as Prime Minister Marjan Sarec paid an official visit to Moscow on Tuesday.



Slovenian Prime Minister Marjan Sarec meets his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev
(Photo sources: www.gov.si)

Ways to increase trade were discussed and investments were also broached, including the politically sensitive expansion of the Krsko nuclear power station, a project of interest to Russian investors. Sarec and Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev came out of talks calling for a strengthening of cooperation, noting that bilateral trade could increase despite ongoing EU sanctions against Russia. Sarec was told Russian investors are interested in rail projects in Slovenia and the planned construction of a second unit at the Krsko nuclear power station. Sarec refused to say at whose initiative nuclear energy was broached, and when quizzed how it might affect Slovenia's relations with the US if Russia was to build unit two at Krsko, he said “*Slovenia is neither pro-American nor pro-Russian,*

Slovenia is pro-European and pro-Slovenian."
(www.sta.si)

- September 11th, Foreign Minister Miro Cerar does not believe Prime Minister Marjan Sarec's official visit to Russia could worsen Slovenia's relations with allies, either the US or the EU. The visit is very important, especially from the economic aspect, Cerar told STA on the margins of the Prime Minister's first visit to Moscow. The visit was a follow-up to the story which began at July's session of the Slovenia-Russia Commission, which plans joint business projects, said Cerar. "We can see these projects already bringing concrete results," Cerar said, noting Slovenian energy company PETROL signed two contracts with Russian partners on Tuesday. "In this way we preserve geopolitical relations and create room for our businesspeople. Slovenia is a responsible and trustworthy EU member and joined the sanctions [against Russia], but our business, cultural and political ties must live on," Cerar said. The Minister rejected second thoughts voiced by some that the high-profile Russia visit, featuring three Ministers in Sarec's entourage, could in any way deteriorate relations with Slovenia's allies. He stressed that as Foreign Minister in the Sarec Government, he set himself a goal of balancing relations with the US, after Slovenia's foreign policy had been criticized for favoring Russia under his predecessor Karl Erjavec. "I have made an effort to intensify relations with the US," he stressed. (www.sta.si)

- September 13th, Slovenian Interior Minister Bostjan Poklukar proposed that Slovenia and Austria form joint Police patrols to police the Slovenian-Austrian border, as he hosted his counterpart Wolfgang Peschorn. Saying it was a

good proposal, Peschorn said the Austrian Government would examine it to see if it could fully contain the migration pressure. Poklukar reiterated Slovenia's stance that Austria's border checks with Slovenia had a negative impact on local population on both sides of the border, causing economic damage and long lines of vehicles on the shared border. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Minority Government of Marjan Sarec enjoys relative political stability. Sarec's visit to Moscow was of significant importance for Slovenia, especially in the fields of energy and infrastructure. Although there are voices claiming that Slovenia approached Russia "more than the acceptable limits," Government's officials stress that nothing will change in country's foreign relations and balances. However, energy dependency of pro-western countries by Russia is a questionable issue for the US and EU. In this context, Slovenian PETROL signed several agreements with Russian companies, while Russia seeks to be engaged in the extension of Krsko nuclear power plan. Slovenia – Croatia relations may be tested in coming period due to the latter's effort to join the Schengen Zone. It should be underlined that relations between Croatia and Slovenia are in low level and an "underworld war" is ongoing (at political, diplomatic and intelligence context) due to the two countries border 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: September 11th,

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke to German Chancellor Angela Merkel over the phone, according to Turkey's Presidential Communications Directorate. Erdogan and Merkel discussed migration, developments in Syria, Libya and bilateral relations, the Directorate said in a statement. Turkey has been pressing the EU - of which Germany is a powerhouse member - to fulfill its obligations to do more to help in the migrant and refugee crisis. Erdogan had earlier warned that Turkey cannot deal with a renewed migration wave from conflict-torn Idlib, Syria, saying if the EU does not step up, Turkey might open the doors for migrants to cross into Europe. The President had also said that Turkey so far spent around 40 billion euro for refugees, while support from the EU to Turkey totaled only around 3 billion euro, breaking the EU's pledges in a 2016 deal with Turkey to stem irregular migration. Turkey currently hosts some 3.6 million Syrian refugees, more than any other country in the world. (www.dilysabah.com)

- September 13th, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he will discuss buying US-made missiles with President Donald Trump this month

despite ongoing tension with Washington sparked by Ankara's purchase of Russia's S-400 missile air defense system. In an interview with Reuters news agency on Friday, Erdogan said he discussed buying the surface-to-air Patriot missiles in a phone call with Trump two weeks ago, and would follow up on those talks when the pair meet at the UN General Assembly, which opens next week. *"I said no matter what package of ... S-400s we get, we can buy from you a certain amount of Patriots,"* Erdogan said. *"But I said we have to see conditions that at least match up to the S-400s,"* he said, adding that he was referring to the possibility of joint production and favorable lending terms. The Turkish leader's comments come after Ankara's purchase of the Russian missile system in July irked Washington and raised the prospect of US sanctions being rolled out against its NATO ally. The State Department has said an offer to sell Raytheon's Patriot missile defense system to Ankara had expired. (www.aljazeera.com)

- September 13th, Turkey may send a third drill ship to operate in waters off the island of Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean, the country's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in an interview with Reuters published on Friday. Turkey has already sent two drilling ships, Fatih and Yavuz, as well as an exploration vessel, in search of hydrocarbons in the region. Asked if there is a potential for energy cooperation with other countries, Erdogan said all options are open. *"We have two drill ships. A third is likely to come. We have two exploration vessels. All these ships have begun work gradually and are continuing,"* he noted. The Turkish President accused Greek Cypriots of violating international law by not

sharing the region's natural resources with the Turkish-Cypriot community. (www.reuters.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey cannot trust the US in implementing the agreement recently was reached by the two parts regarding the establishment of a 32 kilometers long safe zone within Syria eastern of Euphrates river. It is true that the US are acting like gaining time and are reluctant in accelerating procedures. Turkey always maintains the “threat” of a unilateral military operation. Erdogan openly negotiates the refugee flows with the EU. In a phone call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel he asked for financial aid and other benefits; the EU may negotiate seeking to reach a new agreement with Turkey. President Erdogan asked from the US President Donald Trump to think the possibility of providing Turkey with Patriot air defense systems. Turkey is a pivotal country enjoying geopolitical importance and having one of the largest militaries (the 2nd within NATO). Due to its geopolitical and geostrategical aspects Turkey has the ability to achieve its national goals and protect its interests either by diplomatic means or by the threat of use or use of force. The US obviously does not seek a full rift with its NATO ally. On the contrary, there are still open official and unofficial channels of communication working on improving bilateral relations. Undoubtedly, the US needs Turkey and the opposite, especially in a period where Middle East is in turbulence. Latest Progress Report on Turkey was disappointing “freezing” any further development regarding its accession process. Turkey is heading in a major economic crisis and the new Central Bank Governor takes initiatives

to maintain state’s liquidity “alive” in order to avoid an unpleasant situation. 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. 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 situation remains unchanged. It achieved to establish an almost permanent presence within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) without any real cost bringing the hydrocarbon exploitation issue on the table of negotiations. The cost so far, for Turkey, is zero achieving simultaneously to question Cypriot sovereign rights. 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.