

MAY 13 - 19, 2019 – VOL. 2 - ISSUE 30



**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).

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ISSN: 2654-0304



ALBANIA: May 14th, Prime Minister Edi Rama said during a meeting with journalists about the possibility of discussing with the opposition, that he does not need international partners to intervene so that he can have dialogue with the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD). He underlined that he is open to make dialogue, but June 30th, 2019 local elections are not negotiable. *“This situation does not have two sides to blame, just one. There is no symmetry in this violence. My responsibility is to do everything possible, but I cannot do anything beyond the Constitution. The state will not succumb to the blind paths of those who want to bring down the state. The Agreement of 2017 did not affect the rule of law. Now they are affecting the state, which belongs to everyone. Everyone must contribute,”* Rama said. *“I think that our job is to be open and cooperative, and we are being cooperative with the other side, which has lost its path. But we will not negotiate the Constitution and the state,”* Rama said. (www.top-channel.tv)

- May 15th, the the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) has decided that the next massive national protest of the opposition will be held on May 25th, 2019. The decision was taken at the meeting of PD leadership. *“The highest forums of the opposition coalition discussed the current situation of our country, which is that of a coup. The entire country and the entire world have now understood that Edi Rama’s nightmare lies on the investigation files that include the Prime Minister himself. The unanimous decision of the opposition is to create a confrontation in all forms. From this*

moment, we will be together with the citizens in a confrontation with the servants and soldiers of the criminal junta in power, until we can guarantee a return to democracy,” PD leader Lulzim Basha declared. (www.top-channel.com)

- May 17th, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Johannes Hahn, said that Albania’s current profile is making it very difficult for a positive decision regarding the EU accession negotiations. The EU official used to describe himself as a firefighter and architect of peace in Western Balkan Countries. However, he explained for Deutsche Welle that the Government in Albania must approach opposition, so that they can be involved in a constructive process. *“We are dealing with a profile that Albania is creating in the international arena,”* Hahn said. When asked if the image will influence the EU accession negotiations, Hahn said that the EU Parliament Members are representatives of people who only see the country’s profile on TV and find it hard to believe that this country is ready to start the EU accession negotiations. (www.top-channel.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Albania has entered in a period of political turmoil and fragile political stability not only because opposition organizes huge protests against the Government, but because opposition MPs decided to abandon Parliament and resign aiming at blocking Parliament’s works. Such decision was strongly criticized by the international community namely the EU and U.S putting at risk the opening of accession negotiations in June 2019. Albanian political crisis is getting deeper and deeper undermining

Albania's EU future. Local elections scheduled for June 30th, 2019 is the milestone of rapid political developments in the country. The ruling socialists push by any mean to conduct the elections, while opposition declares that there will be no elections. Escalation of tension including violent incidents is highly expected as we approach to the election date. PD and LSI leaders, Basha and Kryemadhi respectively pushing for the Government's topple and snap elections. International community strongly supports Rama urging opposition to follow parliamentary procedures avoiding its unconventional practices. It is not normal for a stable country seeking to enter the European club to face such situation of political abnormality. Opposition MPs' resignation aiming at forcing the Government in collapse is not a reasonable political strategy for a functional and stable democracy. It is assessed that Rama is stabilizing situation eliminating possibilities for snap elections. 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. The final decision for opening Albania's accession negotiations in June 2019 is up to the EU Heads of Governments. One should underline that unofficial concerns have already been raised regarding this date due to current political instability. Failure of opening accession talks with the EU it will further destabilize the country toppling the Government. 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:

May 16th, BiH Presidency member Zeljko Komsic, as he announced, yesterday filed a criminal charge against Chairman of BiH Presidency Milorad Dodik to Prosecutor's Office of BiH. Komsic filed criminal charges for Dodik's statement he said on Sunday during marking the anniversary of the Third Infantry Regiment of the Armed Forces of BiH, which inherits the tradition of the former Army of Republika Srpska (RS). During the ceremony, Dodik stated that the decision to abolish the Army of RS under the pressure of the international factor was a mistake, as well as the formation of the Armed Forces of BiH. He also demanded from the Command to wear the former RS uniform on the next anniversary on May 12th, "because it is their day," News Agency Patria reported. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- May 17th, Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA), Democratic Front (Demokratska Fronta - DF), and Union for a Better Future of BiH (Savez za Bolju Budućnost - SBB BiH) Presidents Bakir Izetbegovic, Zeljko Komsic, and Fahrudin Radoncic signed today a joint declaration in the Presidency of Bosnia and

Herzegovina building, which established the principles and priorities of the acting patriotic block in legislative and executive power. *“With the intent to ensure peace, stability and prosperity in the interest of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Democratic Front, the Alliance for a Better Future, and the Party of Democratic Action have decided to form a strong patriotic political block that will act as the following priorities, as part of the legislative and executive power at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina,”* was stated during the presentation. Defense of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and constitutional order of Bosnia and Herzegovina is highlighted as top priority, as well as the preservation of peace, stability and security in the country. Adoption of laws and other measures necessary for the prevention and elimination of discrimination based on ethnic, religious, ideological or other affiliation and adopting economic reforms and building a better business environment with the goal of strengthening the domestic economy and opening up new jobs, was added in the statement. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- May 18th, the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrataor - SNSD) has no objections to Bosnia’s cooperating with NATO as long as that cooperation does not lead towards Bosnia’s membership, the Spokesperson Radovan Kovacevic of the ruling Bosnian Serb party said. NATO remains unpopular with Serbs in both Serbia and Republika Srpska since the Alliance launched airstrikes against the Bosnian Serbs during the 1992-95 Bosnian war and against the Serbian military in 1999 during the conflict

between Belgrade and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Despite the resentment, the SNSD once supported Bosnia’s NATO aspirations but changed its mind and is now strongly opposed to Bosnia becoming part of the military Alliance. The Parliament of the Bosnian Serb semi-autonomous entity within the country, Republika Srpska (RS), has in 2017 adopted a Resolution on Military Neutrality, in line with neighboring Serbia. Kovacevic said that his party, which is both the ruling party in the RS and represents Serb at the state level, will stick to the Resolution. *“Bosnia and Herzegovina has already been cooperating with NATO through the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), which is expiring in December this year,”* Kovacevic said. *“Our position is clear; we have nothing against cooperation with NATO, but we think that cooperation should not go towards us becoming a NATO member country,”* he said. The SNSD proposes that Bosnia continues cooperating with NATO through the IPAP, but that the agreement must emphasize that this does not imply activating the Membership Action Plan (MAP); the last step towards NATO membership he said. *“That is the SNSD proposal and the type of cooperation that is acceptable for the SNSD. It implies that cooperation with NATO remains at the level at which the Republic of Serbia is currently cooperating with NATO, and we do not have a problem with that,”* he said. (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) have reached an agreement to cooperate in forming a Government and it is a matter of time it will be officially announced. It seems that the three parties achieved to bypass their different views on main issues and especially 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. 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. Establishment of auxiliary Police Unit by RS

raised tension between the FBiH and the Serbian entity emerging the mistrust between the state's communities. 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. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests.



BULGARIA: May 13th, Turkish Ambassador Hasan Ulusoy, at the centre of a controversy about his reported call to boost the teaching of Turkish in Bulgarian schools, has told the Foreign Ministry in Sofia that his words were "distorted" by the media. Ulusoy was summoned to the Foreign Ministry on May 13th, 2019 after the controversy erupted at the weekend, with critical comments by Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, Bulgarian Socialist Party leader Kornelia Ninova and several nationalist politicians. With Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva in Brussels for a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers, Ulusoy met Deyan Katarchev, Head of the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry's South Eastern Europe Directorate. Ulusoy had been reported as having made the call on Bulgarian authorities to encourage the study of the Turkish language so as to aid an increase in Turkish investment in Bulgaria. At the meeting at the Foreign Ministry, he was told that his statement was politically unacceptable and did not meet

Bulgaria's expectations regarding maintaining friendly and good neighborly relations, the Ministry said. Ulusoy handed over the text of his speech, explaining that he did not make recommendations for obligatory learning of Turkish language by Bulgarian citizens. According to the Foreign Ministry statement, Ulusoy said that Turkey does not intend to intervene in any way in the domestic politics of the Republic of Bulgaria and in its activity it is guided entirely by the goal of developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations with Bulgaria. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- May 13th, At the initiative of NATO, a series of national and multinational military exercises will be held in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and North Macedonia in May and June 2019, to strengthen security measures in South Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region, Bulgaria's Ministry of Defense said. From May 26th to June 28th, 2019, there will be military exercises in Bulgaria. These training will involve military personnel and equipment from Bulgaria, the US, UK, Ukraine, Greece, North Macedonia, Canada, and Italy. About 6,000 people, up to 1,200 units of equipment and armament and up to 80 military aircrafts will be involved, the Defense Ministry said. The exercises are to be conducted in accordance with the US-Bulgaria agreement on defense co-operation, the plan for preparation of Bulgaria's Armed Forces in 2019, and for US training in Bulgaria and abroad in 2019, the statement said. General planning of the exercises is carried out under the direction of the US Army Commander in Europe, together with host countries. The leadership and control of the exercises will be carried out by a multinational

structure that will be located in Grafenwohr in Germany. A national structure will be deployed under the leadership of the Joint Forces Command in the region of the Bulgarian-American facility of the Novo Selo Training Field, which will carry out the general management and control of the exercises on the territory of Bulgaria and will coordinate the participation of the Bulgarian Armed Forces in exercises outside the country. Director of the national structure for leadership and control of the training will be Major General Ivan Lalov, Deputy Commander of the Joint Force Command. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- May 16th, price remains an issue in Bulgaria's negotiations with the US on the acquisition of F-16 fighter jets it has emerged from statements by Defense Minister Krassimir Karakachanov and Deputy Defense Minister Atanas Zapryanov. Karakachanov has hinted that if the US does not make concessions on the price, Bulgaria may switch to talks with other bidders, which effectively would mean Sweden's offer of JAS-39 Gripen jets. He said that Bulgaria preferred getting the F-16s to re-fitting its existing aircraft – which are ageing Soviet-made MiGs – and he hoped that the US would reduce its price. *“The (F-16) aircraft is nice, Bulgaria has a very clear position that it wants to rearm its aviation with this aircraft,”* a Defense Ministry statement quoted Karakachanov as saying. He said that Bulgaria had made clear its financial capabilities and if the price was not right *“I do not know if it is justified for society and the taxpayer if the price is so high.”* *“I hope that the statement made by the White House when we decided to start the negotiations, that it will comply with our possibilities, will become a reality,”*

Karakachanov said. He said that the other issue on which talks should continue is the method of payment – once-off or over several installments. Separately, Zapryanov, who led a delegation to Washington DC for negotiations, said that the process is going “smoothly” and a result could be expected by mid-June 2019. Zapryanov said that he is optimistic that a contract would be in place by the end of 2019. On May 14th, 2019 speaking to Bulgarian National Radio, Karakachanov said “If we cannot achieve the result we have the right to propose to Parliament to terminate the project or to continue the negotiations with some of the other participants. We have to take into account the price, the package of services and the deadline for payment. We want normal prices consistent with prices for other countries, for example Slovakia,” he told BNR. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bulgaria has not entered yet in political instability but a potential major crisis is always a possibility. The 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. The President Radev grabs every opportunity to criticize the Government (and the Prime Minister Borissov) highlighting his different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Opposition BSP tries to push further Borisov and his Government by strengthening its rhetoric and having tabled three motions of no confidence so far. 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: May 16th, Croatian economy's results bear testimony to the continuation of positive economic trends, but they are not sufficient for the country to reach the development level of old EU member states and structural reforms are necessary to step up the process of convergence, Central Bank Governor, Boris Vujcic, said at a conference in Opatija on Thursday. Achieving higher growth rates to step up the convergence process requires structural reforms, as evidenced by international management quality and business environment indicators, Vujcic said, adding that there is room for improving the implementation of specific European Commission recommendations by

implementing the national reform program. Vujcic believes that the business climate in the country is still not good enough and that there is a lot of room for the improvement of the quality of institutions and the general business environment. Speaking of ways to expedite the process of real convergence, Vujcic said that investment is key to productivity growth. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- May 17th, in reading out his decision today, Judge Damir Rabar noted that there are neither mitigating circumstances nor any room for the situation in Uljanik to improve, and therefore receivership was the only possible ruling. The decision came after six of Uljanik's subsidiaries, including Uljanik Shipbuilding JSC, were forced into receivership over the past month. A decision as to whether or not the other shipyard owned by the Uljanik Group, Treci Maj in Rijeka, will go into receivership will be made by the Commercial Court in Rijeka on June 5th, 2019. The CEO of the China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation recently visited Croatia to see firsthand about possible investment into Uljanik. However, according to Uljanik Group CEO Emil Bulic, no offer has been submitted. However, CSIC may still be interested in Uljanik as a second delegation from the Chinese company is expected to visit to further assess the possibility. Judge Rabar noted today that cooperation between the Uljanik Group and CSIC can continue even after the companies goes into receivership. For his part Bulic told reporters after today's decision that management plans on continuing its negotiations with CSIC so as to preserve Uljanik's valuable assets, specifically, ships already under construction in the docks in Pula and Rijeka valued at 1.4 billion Kuna. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- May 19th, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in Zagreb on Saturday that it is certain that Croatia would be admitted to the passport-free Schengen Area and the euro area during the term of the next European Commission. *"Croatia's accession to the euro area and the Schengen zone is certain in the next term of the European Commission. There is still some work to be done, however, Croatia is on the right track, and Germany wants to be its partner in those efforts,"* Merkel said at a news conference with her host, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, at her side. Plenkovic said that it is important to Croatia that the Schengen zone should be what it used to be, which required a broader agreement inside the EU as to restore the free movement of people. A reporter with the German ARD broadcaster asked Plenkovic about reports of the alleged cruel treatment by Croatian Police of irregular migrants trying to pass through Croatia on their way to Western Europe. *"Croatia has deployed 6,500 Police Officers to control its border, and in the process of border control, we comply with our national legislation, international conventions and the EU acquis,"* Plenkovic said. Croatia takes over the rotating Presidency of the EU in the first half of 2020 and will be succeeded by Germany in the second half of the year. He and Merkel also discussed coordination of strategic objectives during the Croatian and German Presidencies, with the German Chancellor saying that the two countries would be closely cooperating during that time. *"We have to keep peace, security and freedom in Europe if we want to send a signal against any kind of populism, and Croatia and Germany are following that path,"* the Chancellor said. Plenkovic and Merkel recalled that Germany is Croatia's most important trading partner, with

an annual trade volume of 5.3 billion euro, but said that investment could be improved, especially in digital infrastructure. (www.hr.nlinfo.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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 enjoys political stability, while its economy is growing. Border dispute on Piran Bay remains active and Slovenia's initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone, while the EC sends good news regarding Croatia's fiscal policy. 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: May 15th, British High Commissioner Stephen Lillie was summoned to the Foreign Ministry to clarify statements by the UK Government on its stance vis-à-vis Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), after appearing

to say it is a disputed area. Speaking after the cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Government spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said Nicosia has made its demarches to London through the High Commissioner "on the unfortunate statements" by Britain's Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan. "The Cyprus Government will make official representations to the British Government regarding what was said about the Cyprus EEZ," Prodromou said. Speaking in the House of Commons, Duncan said on Tuesday that he had met with the Turkish Ambassador Umit Yalcin on Monday "and had a very constructive talk with him." "The position of the United Kingdom is that, according to the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas [Unclos], exploratory drilling cannot be conducted in any area in which the sovereignty is disputed," Duncan added. Turkey is not a signatory to the convention. Prodromou also said that President Nicos Anastasiades would also be writing a letter to British Prime Minister Theresa May on the matter. "Mr Duncan has been and continues to remain unacceptable," Anastasiades said on Tuesday night. "I want to believe that the appropriate step will be taken by the [UK] Prime Minister, because I believe that his whole position does not reflect the correct policy that should be followed by Great Britain, regarding all the interests it has in Cyprus, and the support Britain has received in these critical times it is going through, even if it is from our small country, which has the same vote as the others," Anastasiades said. In reply to a request on behalf of the National Federation of Cypriots in the UK for clarification on Duncan's statement, the Foreign Office initially repeated the same statement as the British Minister saying "The position of the UK is that, in line with the UN

Convention on the Law of the Sea, exploratory drilling should not proceed in any area where sovereignty is under dispute.” (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 16th, Turkey’s violation of Cyprus’ sovereign rights in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) prevents the resumption of peace negotiations, President Nicos Anastasiades told the UN special envoy to Cyprus Jane Holl Lute. In a phone call on Wednesday night with the President stressed that the EEZ violation undermines attempts to foster an appropriate [political] climate. According to Government spokesperson Prodromos Prodromou on Thursday, Anastasiades *“reiterated to Lute for the umpteenth time the readiness of the Greek Cypriot side to participate in a new round of talks for a viable and functional solution to the Cyprus problem, on the basis of UN resolutions, EU acquis, and the six parameters proposed by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.”* According to Prodromou, Lute told Anastasiades that she remained determined, on the basis of instructions given Guterres, to help create appropriate conditions for resumption of dialogue. The Spokesman was also asked whether the UK will be asked to clarify their position on the Republic’s EEZ sovereignty following Britain’s Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan’s remarks on Tuesday when he seemed to suggest that the area the Turks have entered with their drillship Fatih, just 60 km west of Paphos, is disputed. Prodromou said that Anastasiades *“expects that the UK will follow a position that corresponds to international law, to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos), and, of course, to the position held from early on by the UK Foreign*

Secretary, and to the EU position, as this was announced from the Commission’s Vice-President Federica Mogherini.” (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 17th, Foreign Minister, Nicos Christodoulides, had a telephone conversation with the US President’s National Security Adviser, John Bolton, whom he briefed on the latest developments regarding Turkey’s illegal activities in Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Diplomatic sources told CNA that the two officials exchanged views about the way the issue was being handled and that conversation took place at Christodoulides’ initiative. Bolton reiterated the US administration’s position on the matter, as it has already been expressed in a State Department’s statement, and the two officials agreed to remain in constant contact on the issue. The State Department statement said that the US *“is deeply concerned by Turkey’s announced intentions to begin offshore drilling operations in an area claimed by the Republic of Cyprus as its Exclusive Economic Zone”* and that *“this step is highly provocative and risks raising tensions in the region. We urge Turkish authorities to halt these operations and encourage all parties to act with restraint.”* Ankara has issued a Navigational Telex (NAVTEX), announcing its intention to start drilling off Cyprus until September 3rd, 2019. The Turkish drill ship *“Fatih”* is located almost 40 nautical miles west of the Akamas peninsula and 83 nautical miles from the Turkish coast. The area falls within the EEZ and continental shelf of the Republic of Cyprus. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus faces an ongoing crisis with the Turkish drillship *Fatih* invading within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) ready to start oil and gas drills 50 nm west of Pafos. Direct violation of its sovereign rights which aim at establishing “*fait accompli*” in a maritime area Turkey claims it enjoys full rights to exploit, is a serious evolving situation which should be resolved in terms of crisis management under pressure conditions. It looks like Cyprus (and Greece) did not have a resolution plan for such situation although it was an expected and predicted Turkish reaction. Diplomatic support of the US and EU through statements is not enough to deter Turkey from its operational plans. Cyprus should push the EU for specific sanctions against Turkey as a direct measure of pressure. What Cyprus really needs at the moment is the presence of aeronautical forces to protect its interests and sovereignty and this lack of military force is a major gap for exercising its sovereign rights. To conclude, Cyprus should stop immediately this situation which threatens its national sovereignty. Escalation of tension including armed violence could not be excluded. In an important and decisive step, Cyprus filed officially to the UN the coordinates for the northern (not delimited) part of its EEZ, something it had not done previously demolishing Turkey’s argument that it is a disputed (grey) area. UK differentiated its stance compared to the US and EU speaking about “a disputed area” provoking Cyprus harsh reaction. Cyprus signed a letter of intent with France strengthening its military cooperation. In fact France will use Cypriot naval facilities entering in a region was traditional under UK influence. 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. At the moment, Cyprus is engaged in three different trilateral formations which also include strong features of strategic cooperation and alliance; Cyprus – Egypt – Greece, Cyprus – Israel – Greece, and Cyprus – Jordan – Greece. The last two are highly improved due to the US engagement. At the moment Cyprus is promoting a fourth model of cooperation between Cyprus, Greece, and Lebanon. In other words, Cyprus is becoming the “leading link” between the Middle East and the Arab world on the one hand and the EU on the other. 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 administration promotes abolishment of the arms embargo against Cyprus allowing it to improve its military capabilities. Conduct of aeronautical exercises in cooperation with other countries (Israel, Egypt etc) sends various messages of defense capability, readiness, and determination. 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. President Anastasiades promotes the scenario of a “bizonal, bicomunal decentralized federation”; an idea which is in principle accepted by the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community and enjoys support from the U.S. However, there are a lot of disputed issues in which both parts should compromise; the most important is considered the decision-making process. 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: May 17th, Foreign Minister Giorgos Katrougalos called on Turkey to end its illegal activities within Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) during talks on Thursday evening with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu on the sidelines of a Council of Europe ministerial meeting in Helsinki. The meeting took place during a period of heightened tensions between the two countries, due to the presence of the Fatih drillship in Cyprus’ EEZ and Turkish exercises in the Aegean. Earlier, Katrougalos reiterated Greece’s support for Turkey’s long-stalled bid to join the European Union in an interview with Politico. *“We are among the few European countries that still believe in that,”* he said. He noted, however, that Turkey *“must first respect its obligations,”* stressing that accession hinges on Ankara respecting *“not just international law but also the rule of law and*

human rights.” However, tensions were raised a notch yesterday after Turkey’s Foreign Ministry accused Greece of sheltering terrorists, following the acquittal by a Greek Court of nine Turkish nationals, all ethnic Kurds, who had been accused of being members of a terrorist organization. *“The acquittal reveals why these terrorist elements are nested in Greece,”* said Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hami Aksoy in a written statement. This decision, he said, *“is clearly interrupting”* the efforts to combat terrorism in Europe. The suspects had been arrested and placed in pretrial detention ahead of a visit by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Greece in December 2017, on suspicion of having links to the DHKP/C, a Turkish far-left group blamed for a string of attacks and suicide bombings in Turkey since 1990. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 17th, the Hellenic Navy has received its first modernized P-3B Orion maritime patrol aircraft from Lockheed Martin, the Greek Defense Ministry said. The delivery, part of a US-Greece defense agreement that also includes the midlife upgrade of another four aircraft, was marked with a ceremony on Friday at Tanagra Air Base north of Athens. *“Modernization of the aircraft will satisfy the Navy’s needs at least until 2040... in the Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean regions,”* Defense Minister Evangelos Apostolakis was quoted as saying. US Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt, who was also present at the event, said that Greece and the US have *“discussed the opportunities that exist to find low-cost solutions to sustain and enhance Greek military capability.”* *“The Greek defense industry is uniquely positioned to provide material solutions for the country’s national security*

requirements while at the same time leveraging Greece's geopolitical relationships and location to once again become a major regional player," he said.



P-3B Orion maritime patrol aircraft during the delivery ceremony

(Photo source: www.hellenicnavy.gr)

The same day Greece took delivery of 70 OH-58D Kiowa Warrior armed scout helicopters and one CH-47 Chinook transport helicopter from the US Army. The helicopters were delivered at Volos Port in central Greece and the process was overseen by Chief of the Army General Staff, Lieutenant-General Georgios Kambas. Mixed crews of Greek and American pilots flew the helicopters to the 1st Army Aviation Brigade at the Stefanovikeio base in Thessaly, where training of the Greek officers will begin immediately. The helicopters are expected to be officially added to Greece's fleet by mid-June. (www.ekathimerini.gr)

- May 18th, the Supreme Court will on May 21st, 2019 discuss the furlough request of convicted terrorist Dimitris Koufodinas after Greece's top Prosecutor Xenia Dimitriou ordered a review late Friday of the decision not to grant him leave. Dimitriou challenged the decision after Koufodinas – serving multiple life sentences for

11 murders he committed as a leading member of the now defunct November 17 terror group – was placed in intensive care as his health deteriorated due to a 15-day hunger strike over the rejection of his furlough request. The rejection of 61-year-old Koufodinas' request also sparked a barrage of “solidarity” attacks by self-styled anarchists against targets in Athens. The N17 hitman had been granted six furloughs in the past but his latest request was rejected last week by a judicial council because judges deemed he remains a threat to society. Justice Minister Michalis Kalogirou voiced his support for Dimitriou's decision, saying it is within her purview as a Supreme Court Prosecutor to do so, and denounced her critics. In a statement on Saturday, the opposition New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) party reacted strongly to the decision by the Supreme Court Prosecutor, insisting that “*no serious democracy is blackmailed by terrorists or their admirers*,” while reiterating its promise to restore the high-security prison regime for terrorists that the Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) Government abolished. For his part, ND leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis stressed while on the campaign trail on the island of Crete that the “*rule of law and democracy cannot be threatened or blackmailed by anyone, let alone a serial killer and 30 thugs that back him*.” He added that he has “*complete confidence*” that Greece's justice system will live up to expectations. (www.ekathimerini.gr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras tried to downgrade the coming European Parliament's elections

claiming that it is nothing more than a poll. Taking into consideration that opposition leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis has demanded snap elections in case ruling SYRIZA loses European elections it is assessed that Tsipras is prepared for a “smooth” defeat. In fact he counts on a small scale defeat (up to 2-3%) in order to avoid snap elections and to gain the necessary political time to reverse the internal political atmosphere and finally to win the national elections. However, there are voices that in case SYRIZA will be defeated on May 26th, election, national parliamentary elections will be held on June 2019. In this context, European Parliament and local elections are of significant importance in Greece being somekind of political referendum. SYRIZA intensifies its efforts to gain the electoral body by announcing social care measures and benefits. Political uncertainty emerged in a period where Greece faces several diplomatic, security, and economic challenges. Internal terrorism is considered as a major unresolved problem of national security undermining stability of the state. Greek – Turkish relations are deteriorating 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 and Greece’s right to militarize East Aegean Sea islands. 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 intensified their activity regarding violation of

Greek airspace and issue of NAVTEXs within Greek territorial waters for military exercises (including fires). Strengthening of military cooperation between Greece and the U.S 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. 70 second-hand helicopters from the US is a remarkable upgrade of Greek military force especially in the field of air reconnaissance, surveillance, and fire support. Security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ.



KOSOVO: May 14th, Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said that the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue is no longer in the hands of the European Union High Representative Federica Mogherini. “High-ranking EU officials were forced to remove the dialogue from Mogherini and others who wanted to lead us into divisions. The decision-making has been returned to Pristina,” he told a news conference after a cabinet meeting. Haradinaj said that the 100% tariffs imposed by his Government on goods from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina would not be revoked even though that is Belgrade’s condition to continue the dialogue to normalize relations. “The process no longer carries the risk of

proposals on divisions and there is stability,” the Prime Minister said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 16th, Kosovo Parliament has on Thursday evening approved a resolution condemning Serbia's genocide in Kosovo war in 1998-1999. Chairman of an ad-hoc Parliamentary Committee, Bilall Sherifi, has presented before MPs the amended Resolution after new suggestions proposed by some of the MPs. He said that after a long debate they have managed to incorporate the proposed suggestions by some of MPs. Sherifi read the resolution which blames Serbia of committing war crimes and genocide during 1998-1999 war in Kosovo which left more than 13,000 people dead and more than 1,600 are still considered as missing. *“This Resolution came twenty years after Serbia committed war crimes in Kosovo, aimed at exterminating Albanians and expelling around one million people from their homes, and killing around 13 thousand unarmed civilians of all ethnicities, but majority of them were Albanians,”* Sherifi said. In the resolution are mentioned more than 100 locations where Serbian forces have committed massacres during the war. *“During the Kosovo war in 1998-1999 around 20 thousand women were exposed to sexual violence. And during these two years over one million people were expelled from their homes,”* Sherifi concluded. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- May 19th, polls opened in four northern municipalities in Kosovo at 7 am on Sunday morning and seniors were the first to vote. About 58,000 people will be electing Mayors of the Northern Mitrovica, Leposavici, Zubin Potok and Zvecan at 87 polling stations. Citizens have the possibility to vote for one of three candidates in

Northern Mitrovica - Goran Rakic from the Serbian List (Srpska lista), Erdana Atici from Self-determination (Vetëvendosje), and Godnje Causi from the Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Demokratike e Kosovës - PDK). The candidates from the Serb List are Vucina Jankovic in Zvecan, Srdjan Vulovic in Zubin Potok and Zoran Todric in Leposavic. They have resigned from their Mayor office in November 2018 over Pristina raising tariffs for Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina by 100%. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo hardens its stance setting more and more obstacles in restarting of Belgrade – Pristina dialogue. After Haradinaj's decision to impose 100% tax on Serbian and Bosnian products which has led negotiation process into a deadlock, the Kosovo Assembly adopted a resolution that Serbs committed genocide during 1998-1999 war. Under these circumstances it is rather difficult to see tangible results in next meeting scheduled for July 2019. 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. The state's authorities show a tendency of escalating tension with Serbia undermining a peaceful resolution of the case. By imposing 100% tariff on Serbian (and Bosnian products), establishing Kosovo army, executing Special Forces operation in northern Kosovo, arresting Serbs, and requesting special court for Serbs it is created a climate which does not facilitate dialogue and the establishment of confidence between the two parties. President Thaci insists once again on

Kosovo – Serbia land swap but only for Kosovo annexation of Presevo, Medvja and Bujanovac where ethnic Albanians are the majority. Mayoral elections in the North (of Serbian majority) were held on May 19th, 2019 without provocations or violent incidents. 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. Establishment of Kosovo Army is also a factor of destabilization since there is always a possibility of Police or military engagement with Serbian forces. Kosovo seeks KSF 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: May 15th, the President of Moldova is not eligible to nominate a candidacy for Prime Minister in the absence of the Parliament's governing bodies, the Moldovan Constitutional Court (CC) ruled on upon considering President Igor Dodon's inquiry. The head of state requested on April 23rd, 2019 the CC to clarify the procedure of nominating a candidate for the Prime Ministerial post. In particular, the President asked whether or not the Head of state must nominate a candidacy for Prime Minister if there is no parliamentary majority that is only eligible to appoint a Government. The CC wrote in its Resolution issued on Wednesday that the

President not only must not but also may not make such a nomination in the absence of the Parliament's governing bodies. The Resolution said in particular "*The [forum's] incapacity to convoke a parliamentary plenary meeting due to the absence of governing bodies that may convoke it is making it impossible for the President to nominate a candidate for Prime Minister.*" The CC Resolution further said that according to the Constitution, the President must hold consultations with parliamentary parties before nominating a Prime Ministerial candidate, and Members of Parliament must elect the forum's governing bodies, including for nominating a candidate for Prime Minister. "*The absence of a body representing the Parliament and of a body that convokes plenary meetings is preventing the President from nominating a candidacy for Prime Minister,*" wrote the Constitutional Court. At the same time, the CC ruled that if there is no officially formed absolute parliamentary majority, but there are Parliament's governing bodies duly elected, then the President must nominate a candidate for Prime Minister, even if the parliamentary parties disagree with his proposal.



Moldovan Constitutional Court
(Photo source: www.constcourt.md)

The CC explicated also that if, upon the formation of parliamentary governing bodies, the President nominates a Prime Ministerial candidate but the Parliament would not assemble for a plenary meeting to discuss the candidacy, this means that the Parliament rejects the candidacy. The CC explicated also the provisions in Article 85 of the Constitution, according to which the Parliament may be dissolved if it fails to express a vote of confidence in the Government within 45 days from putting forward such proposal, and only if the proposal has been rejected minimum 2 times. All CC judgments are final and without appeal, and come into effect from the moment of their adoption. Thus, proceeding from this CC judgment, the incumbent new Parliament of Moldova may be dissolved by the President yet before the start of the Government formation procedure. According to the Constitution, the Parliament may be dissolved by the President either in case of its incapacity to approve Government after the President has nominated a candidate for Prime Minister, or in case the Parliament blocks the adopting of laws for 3 months. This new Parliament held its first plenary meeting last March 21st, 2019 therefore the said 3 month period expires on June 21st, 2019. (www.infotag.md)

- May 16th, Moldova disputes the invocation of the 1992 Agreement and reiterates the illegality of Russian troops' presence on its territory. The subject was raised by Ambassador of Moldova to Austria Victor Osipov at a Security Cooperation Forum (FCS). The diplomat reiterated that the task force of Russian troops is illegal on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and should be withdrawn unconditionally along with the

weapons and ammunition stocks. The Head of the Moldovan mission in Vienna noted that the Russian side has been applying for this quirk for many years, showing the Peace Agreement of July 21st, 1992, in the section asking for explanations regarding the military forces of a state on the territory of another OSCE participating state, which induces an absolutely false perception. Osipov said that the text of the document does not see any statement that could be interpreted as accepting the foreign military presence. Moldova makes a clear distinction between the Russian military contingent within the peacekeeping mechanism existing in the Security Zone on the one hand and the military forces and ammunitions illegally staying on its territory, on the other hand. Osipov reminded that last time the need for unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops and ammunitions was laid down by the UN General Assembly Resolution adopted on June 22nd, 2018. Previously, the Russian Federation has taken this commitment by signing the OSCE Summit Declaration in Istanbul. The diplomat asked to be set down in the FCS meeting journal that it is unacceptable to invoke the 1992 agreement in the reports on the Russian military presence in Moldova. Attending the forum, the Russian military affairs delegation announced that Moldova's request will be communicated to the Russian capital. (www.moldpres.md)

- May 17th, Moldova still has a possibility to avoid an early parliamentary election, though chances for this are thinning, Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM) Press Secretary Vitalie Gamurari said. Gamurari said that he is optimistic about the near future and still hopes that the political parties will

demonstrate their political maturity “when salvation of the country is at stake.” “I hate the thought of Moldova’s possible remaining without Parliament for nearly a year. This would be a total chaos. In such conditions, the Government will certainly continue working but will be restricted in its freedom of action and will have to act without the legislative power’s support. Also, Moldova will not be able to fully carry out its international commitments, including the agenda of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement. And the European Union’s first political response in such situation may concern the visa-free regime for Moldova,” he said. Gamurari named as “reasonable” the Constitutional Court’s judgment that the President of Moldova is not eligible to nominate a candidate for Prime Minister in the absence of governing bodies in Parliament. (www.infotag.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political deadlock continues in Moldova after parties failed to form a ruling majority so far. It seems that PSRM and ACUM block failed to reach an agreement leaving “free space” for a PSRM and PDM approach and agreement. Otherwise, snap elections are ahead. Political instability and uncertainty affect vitally in state’s function blocking reforms and keeping the country far from European standards. President Dodon benefits from political gap promoting a closer relation between his country and Russia. Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. Political situation in the country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which

will strengthen state’s transparency, accountability, and democratic values. The current Government has walked into dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime and deep and determined justice reforms are needed. The U.S, EU and IMF express their major concerns. 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 go unnoticed by international stakeholders. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: May 13th, in the past five years, the USA has donated more than 5 million dollars to Montenegro. According to a State Department Official Montenegro has obtained so far million amounts through the donation programs, as well as assistance to the modernization of the Armed Forces and training of personnel. As far as concretely the donation regarding armored vehicles is concerned, interlocutor of “Pobjeda” said that the vehicles that were not in use were donated to the countries that needed them. “US donations were mostly aimed at the improvement of NATO interoperability, providing deployment of the Armed Forces of Montenegro as way of giving support to the operations in the USA as well as for the modernization of the armed forces,” said the State Department official. He added that the USA have helped Montenegro with tactic radio devices, submarine information management system, night sight devices, equipment for the

identification of chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear materials as well as equipment for the elimination of explosive devices. In addition, Montenegro has been provided with almost half million dollars assistance through the military education. *“In the past couple of years, the USA, have provided for Montenegro 500.000 dollars for financing international military education and training,”* reported State Department. (www.cdm.me)

- May 16th, starting from 2007 until last year, Turkey has invested in Montenegro a total of 165.300.904 euro the Montenegrin Investment Promotion Agency (MIPA) reported. FDI inflow from Turkey is constantly growing. Last year it amounted 53 million euro. As representatives of MIPA said, there are currently 2.162 companies founded by Turkish investors. The greatest number of them is dealing with real-estate sector, retail and wholesale trade, and hospitality. *“Turkish enterprises show special interest in sectors of tourism, agriculture, energy, infrastructure and banking, as well as using the port in Bar for the creation of production capacities in the free zone, i.e. transfer of goods from Turkey and distribution towards countries of the region,”* said the representatives of the Agency. Considering the fact that Turkey is the eighth country in the world by furniture manufacturing and the first in Europe by production of plastic panels, economic cooperation in the area of wood processing between Montenegro and Turkey could intensify. *“Many people from Turkey are considered credible investors but they lack capacities. On the other side, there are huge potential and credible companies which are constantly expressing their*

interest in carrying out capital projects. Some companies are big players at global level and they even surpass many European giants,” said the representatives of the Agency. Companies from Turkey appreciate the fact that Montenegro is the leader in economic development in Balkans and the first candidate for the EU. Furthermore, it uses euro as its currency and is NATO member. Investment wave from Turkey *“boomed”* last year when representation offices of many Turkish companies were opened in Montenegro. (www.cdm.me)

- May 17th, tensions rose between ethnic Albanians and Orthodox Christian believers after unknown vandals desecrated the foundations of a church in the village of Martinaj in northern Montenegro, where locals claim there are no longer any Christians. A local dispute has turned into became a much larger inter-ethnic row after unknown perpetrators removed a wooden cross from the foundations of St. Vasilije Ostroski church in the village of Martinaj and threw it into a nearby stream. The incident was reported by Montenegrin media on Tuesday but escalated when former Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha wrote on social media that *“Montenegro-Serbian extremists are restoring the church to provoke Albanian residents.”* *“I call on local and state authorities in Montenegro to intervene and prevent the illegal activities of extremist groups that cause inter-ethnic and religious tensions,”* Berisha wrote on Thursday. Since 2001, the Serbian Orthodox Church has been trying to restore the church, of which only the foundations remain, but the ethnic Albanian majority in the village has consistently opposed the initiative. Martinaj is situated in the mainly Bosniak

(Muslim Bosnians) and Albanian municipality of Gusinje, where locals have previously asked ethnic Albanian politicians to demand that the restoration work on the church be halted, calling it a “provocation.” During a gathering of priests and Orthodox believers at the church foundations in 2013, a conflict erupted with local villagers, and police arrested 22 people. Orthodox Christians and priests set up a wooden cross at the site at end of April, but it was removed two weeks afterwards. Local Serbian Orthodox Church parish priest Bojan Radunovic appealed to ethnic Albanians in the village to show restraint. “Orthodoxy is a religion of peace, love and forgiveness, but we also expect citizens of other religions to behave in such a way and not to try to deny anyone the freedom of religion, as we do not do that,” Radunovic told daily newspaper on Vijesti on Wednesday. The Serbian Orthodox Church meanwhile called on the Montenegrin authorities to deal “with people who spread religious and national [ethnic] hatred.” At a meeting on Thursday with the Vice-President of the Montenegrin Parliament, Genci Nimanbegu, ethnic Albanians from Gusinje said that the church was being rebuilt in a village which has no members of the Orthodox faith. “We do not object to the construction of a religious building, but only Albanians live in this village, and the church is being restored on the property of the Prelvukaj family,” citizens claimed. “The state should respond,” one of them, Arber Vukaj, told Montenegro’s public broadcaster. The Prelvukaj family sued the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2011, but a Court in the Plav municipality concluded that the land on which the church is located does not belong to the family. The verdict was confirmed by the High Court in Bijelo Polje

and the Supreme Court of Montenegro. St. Vasilije Ostroski church was built in 1928, but was destroyed in 1941 during World War II. According to the last census, the population of the Gusinje municipality is 54% Muslims (Bosnians etc), 22% Albanians, and 5.5% Orthodox Christians. (www.balkaninsight.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Massive 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. Protest movement and opposition parties reached an agreement to join forces for toppling the Government ensuring fair and free elections. Of course, under these circumstances polarization of political situation could not be excluded undermining the EU process of the country. Court verdict on DF members, Serbian and Russian citizens engaged in 2016 attempt coup was announced including high sentences for those involved. Although DF leadership implied strong protests and reactions nothing happened yet. State officials and Police announced that are ready to deal with any attempt to destabilize the country and disturb citizens security. However, there is always the possibility of violent incidents. In general, Montenegro has entered in a fragile period (following the Southeastern Europe trend!). The EP assessment was positive praising the state’s efforts to implement major reforms, but on the other hand it underlined the problems of the rule of law, media freedom, corruption, money laundering, and organized crime. However, the EP stated that Montenegro under certain

conditions may be able to access the EU by 2025. It is assessed that the EU and U.S 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. Although the Government shows determination to take concrete measures against corruption, organized crime, and money laundering it is assessed that a lot should be done to reach such a level of economic activity; mainly in the field of public administration, public sector corruption, and money laundering. Imprisonment of opposition MPs is a worrying and alarming sign regarding rule of law and democratic values in the country. 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: May 15th, the European Commission (EC) will recommend the opening of negotiations for North Macedonia and Albania's accession in the EU. This was confirmed by EU European Neighborhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations Commissioner, Johannes Hahn. In an interview for Radio Free Europe, Hahn said

that the recommendation will be made on May 29th, 2019 when the EC publishes its annual report on the progress made by countries which are part of the enlargement process. However, there are still no clear signals whether a date will be given on the launch of accession talks. North Macedonia's Foreign Minister, Nikola Dimitrov said in a speech delivered at the German Bundestag, that he expects good news from the EC. *"Despite the aggravated political situation in Europe today, despite the upcoming European elections, we cannot afford not to be a story of success. My country is a success story which must be encouraged and be supported if we want to make a difference,"* Dimitrov said. Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, Bujar Osmani said that this summer, the country will get a date for the start of accession talks. *"We are working with EU member countries to prove that we have delivered all the necessary criteria to enter the second phase, namely, the launch of accession talks,"* Osmani said. However, French Ambassador to Skopje, Christian Thimonier has declared in the recent days that he cannot talk about dates before the publication of the EC report. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- May 15th, changes in top ministerial positions and state institutions will be known in the beginning of June, followed by interventions in municipalities by the end of the month, said North Macedonia's Prime Minister Zoran Zaev. Several Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Directors will be replaced Zaev said. *"I already have had the concept in my head. The main criteria will be arrogance, failure to meet citizens' expectations, sluggish actions by officials, nepotism, remarks by the anti-corruption commission; all aspects*

will be taken into consideration. I believe we will take the proper solutions that will speed up the tempo in the country, because citizens expect concrete results after the big political decisions and the completion of the presidential elections,” Zaev told reporters. He said a meeting with the Albanian party, Democratic Union for Integration’s (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) leader Ali Ahmeti and other coalition partners regarding the Government reshuffle is to be scheduled in the coming days. Zaev noted they are all responsible before the citizens. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- May 17th, the Armed Forces’s transformation process into their new formation structure will last 10 years the Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General Vasko Gjurchinovski announced. North Macedonia’s Armed Forces transformation was announced in the Strategic Defense Overview that was made last year, and Gjurchinovski expects the President and Supreme Commander Stevo Pendarovski to determine the new structure and formation of the army soon, that will encompass the active and the reserve personnel.



Chief of North Macedonia’s Armed Forces
General Staff, Lieutenant General Vasko
Gjurchinovski

(Photo source: www.arm.mil.mk)

According to the General, the new formation will encompass and adjust the active personnel, the active and the general reserve i.e. the reserve personnel that will be filled and functional immediately including the rest of the reserve forces. Gjurchinovski stressed that the Armed Forces’ reforms are in its final phase. It is expected that in June the Government will adopt the long-term plan for the defense development that is underway with the cooperation with the Alliance. North Macedonia as a new NATO member should transform its Armed Forces in order to correspond in the Alliance’s operational goals and expectations. Type of military forces and equipment are just two of the main issues the new transformation and reforms should prepare. NATO has commented that “*we have fancy plans but now we shall have to make them real,*” Gjurchinovski said. A key goal of the reforms is formation of a light infantry battalion in high operational readiness to join NATO’s action. Transformation “*is an imperative,*” Gjurchinovski who expects the reform documents to be completed by the end of the year, said. (www.meta.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The Prime Minister Zoran Zaev announced that in the beginning of June will proceed in an extensive governmental reshuffle including not only Ministers and Deputy Ministers, but also top officials in state’s institutions. Such reaction shows that the presidential election’s result

(mainly in the first round) was rather unexpected and disappointing for the ruling coalition. Although Zaev fully controls the internal politics (especially after the election of Pendarovski as the new President), it is assessed that in a possible snap election opposition VMRO-DPMNE could win the race. In this context, VMRO-DPMNE declares that is the most powerful political force in the country since Pendarovski was elected by the ethnic Albanians massive voting in favor of him insisting for early parliamentary elections. It is assessed that the EU will offer its support to Zaev by opening accession negotiations in coming summer (June – July 2019) strengthening his political power in the country. In a different case, VMRO-DPMNE will push further for snap elections and ruling SDSM will be in a very difficult situation. In other words, the country's political stability is in the EU hands. Enjoying the NATO accession and opening of accession negotiations with the EU Zaev will strengthen his position feeling more comfortable to call for early elections. Ratification of NATO accession protocol by the member states proceeds rapidly. Although, there is concern for Turkey's ratification due to the fact that it tried to connect the North Macedonia accession process to NATO with its demands over FETO persecution, the Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister assured that his country will ratify the protocol soon. Moreover, it seems that Turkey does not welcome the strengthening of North Macedonia – Greece relations; one should note that Greece has taken over North Macedonia's airspace protection in the context of NATO. 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: May 13th, Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) Chairman Liviu Dragnea has met Palestine's Ambassador in Bucharest, Fouad Kokaly in his office at the Chamber of Deputies on Monday morning, sources told Digi24.ro. According to these sources, Dragnea would have assured the Palestine Ambassador that Romania would not relocate its Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and that he does not want to ruin the historical relations between Romania and the Arab world. The above-mentioned sources say that Liviu Dragnea is interested in the Arab League's support for Romania to obtain a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Palestine's Embassy issued a press release after the Ambassador's meeting with Dragnea, stating that the Romanian Embassy will not be moved to Jerusalem. *"The Embassy of the Palestinian State hails Mr. Liviu Dragnea's decision according to which the Romanian Government will not relocate the Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem,"* reads the press release. Other diplomatic sources revealed that Dragnea had refused to meet the Palestinian Ambassador last year when the PSD Government had announced the decision to move Romania's Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. However, several hours after the Palestine Ambassador's announcement, Dragnea reacted, saying that his statements *"do not reflect at all"* the discussions they held, asking the Embassy to go back over them. *"I also read the statements of the Palestinian Ambassador following the meeting we had yesterday. They do not reflect the discussions we had yesterday under any circumstances. I clearly said what I have publicly stated in many other occasions; the*

Foreign Ministry has concluded the analysis on a potential relocation of Romania's Embassy in Israel. After that, the document was forwarded for an opinion to the Foreign Affairs and National Security institutions. Considering the latest developments on the Peace Process in the Middle east, the analysis is under a continuous updating process," Dragnea told stiripesurse.ro. The PSD leader argued an agreement at institutional level is desirable and any decision in this regard will have to be based both on constitutional provisions and on observing the international law. *"I asked the Palestine Embassy today to immediately go back over the information they released publicly for they have nothing to do with what has been discussed,"* Liviu Dragnea said. The issue of Romanian Embassy's relocation to Jerusalem stirred controversies in 2018 and prompted an open war between the Presidency on one hand and the Government and the PSD leader on the other. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- May 13th, the European Commission (EC) will place Romania under a new control mechanism to try and avoid activating Article 7 of the EU Treaty (which would suspend some of the country's rights as an EU member), if the changes to the criminal code, criminal procedure code and corruption law recently passed by the Parliament are enforced, EC first vice president Frans Timmermans wrote in an official letter to the Romanian authorities. The new mechanism, called the Rule of Law Framework, would replace the Control and Verification Mechanism (CVM), which was imposed on Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 when they joined the EU to monitor the two countries' progress in justice reform and fight against corruption and organized crime. While

politicians in Bucharest have been asking over the last two years that the CVM is lifted, the European Commission stressed in its latest CVM report that Romania actually made steps back in addressing the CVM recommendations and added new ones. Meanwhile, the ruling coalition in Romania ignored these warnings and continued their controversial reforms in the justice area, which external observers see as weakening the rule of law and fight against corruption in the country. The EC official also states that the EC, as guardian of the EU Treaties, *"will not hesitate to swiftly open proceedings under Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) against any related infringement of Union law it may identify."* The letter is addressed to Romania's President Klaus Iohannis, Senate President Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, Chamber of Deputies Speaker Liviu Dragnea, and Prime Minister Viorica Dancila, according to G4Media, which published the document. The document has four pages, two of which include a short presentation of the changes already made by the Romanian authorities in the area of justice and of the amendments to the criminal codes voted by the Parliament, which raise serious concerns. Regarding judicial independence, the CVM report of November 2018 identified serious issues concerning reduced legal guarantees for judicial independence. Subsequent Government Emergency Ordinances amending the Justice laws have increased these concerns. For example, the Romanian authorities have put in place a system of strict and extensive disciplinary and new liability of Magistrates. Together with the special section in the Prosecution Office for investigating Magistrates and in light of the recent track record of the Judicial Inspection, this results in a chilling

effect on Magistrates when it comes to exercising their independence. Regarding the effective fight against crime, there is a clear trend to challenge the authorities, notably the High Court of Cassation and Justice and the National Anti-Corruption Directorate, which are essential for the fight against corruption. This trend points to a lack of loyal cooperation between state institutions, affecting the efficiency and independence of the judicial system. This lack of cooperation has also been shown in controversial nomination procedures, which have damaged confidence in the system. The long-standing Commission recommendation to put procedures in the public prosecution on a robust and independent basis continues to be ignored. The amendments adopted by the Romanian Parliament on April 24th, 2019 to the Romanian Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Special Law on Corruption added to these concerns. These provisions risk creating a situation of de facto impunity for crimes, including corruption crimes, whereas, as underlined by the Venice Commission, Romania like every other state, is under the positive obligation to ensure that its criminal system is effective in the fight against serious forms of crimes. The impact of these changes would be aggravated further by any legislation to allow extraordinary appeals in cases affected by the Constitutional Court ruling on panels of the High Court of Cassation and Justice, which in itself amounts to an interference in the independence of the judiciary and could affect the effective protection of the financial interests of the EU. (www.romania-insider.com)

- May 16th, “*Re-unification with Bessarabia*” must become Romania’s third national project – after integration with the European Union and NATO, believes Constantin Codreanu, a MP of Romania from the People’s Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP), who was born and raised in Moldova. “*The flame of Romanianism has always burnt in Bessarabia [the historic territory between the Prut and Dniester Rivers plus a greater part of the present-day Chernovtsy and Odessa regions of Ukraine, which before 1940 belonged to the Kingdom of Romania]. This needs to be valued and upheld by concrete actions,*” He wrote on social media. With reference to an opinion poll carried out in Romania recently, Codreanu wrote that “*nearly 70% Romanians support the idea of unification with Bessarabia.*” For an instrument of such a reunification policy, he mentioned “*naturalization of the Romanians from behind the Prut River*” [i.e. Moldovans living in Moldova]. Also, he believes it is necessary to establish a separate “*Ministry of Reunification*” in Romania, and the Fund “*Moldova for a direct support of its local [Moldovan] authorities.*” “*Both countries ought to develop cooperation in the energy sector. Romania must broaden an access to its markets for agricultural produce from the Republic of Moldova, and to simplify an access to the Romanian labor market for Romanians from Moldova having no Romanian citizenship. Yet another strategic objective must be the restoration of the 14 bridges across the Prut ruined by Soviet troops in 1944,*” wrote Codreanu. (www.infotag.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government has been transformed into an “open battle” undermining political stability of the country. Iohannis strongly opposes against Government’s plans to intervene in judicial system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state’s justice. Under these circumstances, it is assessed that political climate will be fully polarized affecting Romania’s political stability. Romania is running the Presidency of the Council of EU facing criticism and non-confidence by the EU member states’ high officials. The state looks divided in major institutional issues such as national defense, justice, and security. In this context, one should add the direct European Commission’s warning for imposing a new control mechanism over state’s judicial system and reforms (Rule of Law Framework) in order to avoid activating article 7 of the EU Treaty (suspending certain rights of an EU member state when a country is considered at risk of breaching the EU’s core values). The state faces political abnormality in many levels which at the moment could be resolved only by early parliamentary elections. The Prime Minister’s announcement of transferring Romanian Embassy in Israel from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem harmed the state’s relations with Arab world increasing security risk in the country. However, ruling PSD leader Liviu Dragnea had talks with Palestine Ambassador to Bucharest in an effort to de-escalate tension and restore confidence between Romania and Arab world. 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: May 13th, Deputy leader of the opposition Party of Freedom and Justice (Stranka Slobode i Pravde - SSP) Marinika Tepic said late on Sunday that organization would soon present a declaration on the reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians which, according to SSP, both Pristina and Belgrade Parliaments should adopt. Tepic told Nova S television declaration would be the beginning of reconciliation process between the two nations. “For seven years we have not come an inch closer to a solution to Kosovo issue,” she said adding the topic was highly sensitive. Tepic added that the Kosovo status should be separated from the issue of people’s needs. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 16th, the four MiG-29 fighters that Belarus handed over to Serbia earlier this year will be delivered following maintenance work early in 2021, the Minsk-based news agency BelTA reported on Thursday. “Belarus will hand over upgraded MiG-29 aircraft to Serbia in early 2021,” the Government-owned news agency said quoting the Chairman of the State Military Industrial Committee Roman Golovchenko. He said the aircraft are undergoing maintenance in line with the specified schedule. “Three are being repaired while another one is being inspected for defects,” he said and added that Serbia is paying for the repairs and upgrades as requested by its military. BelTA reported earlier that Belarus military handed the four MiG-29s to the Armed

Forces of Serbia at a February 25th, 2019 ceremony at Baranovichi in the Brest Oblast. Serbia received also six MiG-29s from Russia earlier and is planning to upgrade those aircraft as well at its own expense. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 17th, parliamentary elections in Serbia will be held early next year (2020), President Aleksandar Vucic said on Friday. He added that “it does not matter if they take place then, in the winter, or in the spring.” As things stand there will be no early parliamentary elections at this time, Vucic told the RTS. Asked what he considered his greatest success in the two years he has been in office, the President said he was proud of the results in the construction of road infrastructure, the regulation of public finances, the strengthening of partnerships with China, Russia and many Western countries. Vucic also said that “his only worry” is Kosovo and Metohija “but Belgrade behaves responsibly.” (www.b92.net)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Serbia has entered in a period of fragile political stability due to citizens' reactions against governmental practices regarding human rights, media freedom, and elections transparency. However, it seems that opposition protest and reactions lose momentum. According to the President Alexandar Vucic elections will be held in 2020. 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. 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 one should not expect any progress in the new meeting in Paris scheduled for July 2019. Serbia strengthens its relations with Russia (and China) seeking stronger support regarding Kosovo case. Security situation is complex and uncertain since Serbia apart from political and diplomatic means has engaged its military and security forces. The Armed Forces are in high readiness alert but Vucic tried to de-escalate situation by stating that war is not a possible solution. However, none could predict Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation included) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said 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. It has started an armed race, receiving new weapons mainly from Russia including MIG-29 fighter jets, Attack Helicopters Mi-35 and Mi17, and air defense system Pantsir (not official yet).



SLOVENIA: May 13th, Defense Minister, Karl Erjavec announced that the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) have deployed additional soldiers to the borders with Croatia to help Police manage the increasing number of illegal crossings of migrants. Erjavec said that

help had been requested by the Police adding that the SAF have more units ready to be deployed at any moment. According to the SAF, 35 soldiers were additionally deployed on Saturday to the southern border and the current number of soldiers in the daily shift is 66. The additional 35 soldiers were deployed to the area covered by the Ilirska Bistrica Police station, while the remaining 31 serve in various locations, the SAF announced. Police with the support of SAF has responded to the increasing number of illegal crossings in the borders. *“I can say that we have units ready to boost the presence of the Slovenian Army in the southern border at any moment, of course in mixed units with the Police,”* Erjavec said. Military support came after several hundred people gathered in the city of Crnomelj on Saturday afternoon demanding better control of Slovenia’s southern border. The rally was called after four illegal migrants abducted an elderly man and used his car to drive to the border with Italy. (www.sta.si)

- May 14th, Slovenia has to modernize its Armed Forces (SAF) so that they will be able to perform missions of greatest intensity with excellence, President Borut Pahor, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, said as he addressed a ceremony on the eve of SAF Day. Delivering the keynote at the Cerklje ob Krki military airfield Pahor said that Slovenia is a safe country and that its military is a pillar of security. Shortcomings may have been detected in its readiness, but the military still performs its duties perfectly, at home and abroad, he said. The job of a soldier cannot be compared with similar jobs, said Pahor pointing to poor equipment. *“However, it is encouraging that significant systemic changes are on the*

horizon after years of putting this off,” he emphasized. Slovenia needs to make strategic investments in national security systems, the President said, highlighting cyber threats as a demanding modern-day challenge. It is safe to say that not all problems in this world can be resolved peacefully, although Slovenia will strive for that until the end. *“In this case, Slovenia needs to be completely ready in all aspects,”* Pahor said. Defense Minister Karl Erjavec underlined the importance of mutual trust, respect and loyalty in his address saying that he would not allow that trust be shattered. *“I will not allow anyone who is not trustworthy to undermine the military's organization in the sake of politics seeking to politicize the Slovenian military,”* Erjavec said days after the opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka – SDS) filed a motion to oust him in the wake of the dismissal of Force Commander, Brigadier General Miha Skerbinc. Chief of the General Staff, Major General Alenka Ermenc said Slovenia needed a well-equipped and trained military force to guarantee its own defense as well as to provide support to other stakeholders in the system of national security. According to her, in 2017 and 2018 the force managed to stabilize the acquired level of development in some fields. Ermenc underlined that shortage of personnel is the major problem that will grow only worse unless comprehensive systemic measures are introduced. (www.sta.si)

- May 15th, the US Army has decided to curtail ongoing military activities in Slovenia due to restrictions imposed at the Pocek training field near Postojna, the US Embassy in Ljubljana announced. *“US Forces are awaiting concrete*

rules and guidelines, to be outlined by the Ministry of Defense in consultation with local municipalities, so that they can forecast, plan, and conduct future training within those rules and guidelines,” the Embassy told the STA. The statement came after TV Slovenija reported Monday that the US military had been considering no longer participating in joint exercises in Slovenia in the current scope because at Pocek, night-time activities are limited due to protests by the local community. Defense Minister Karl Erjavec however said after a meeting with Gautam Rana, the Chargé d' Affaires at the US Embassy, there was no reason for concern since the planned exercises would be carried out as agreed. The Embassy said the US forces appreciated the opportunity to train jointly with the Slovenian Armed Forces in an area with well-established range facilities like those in Pocek. *“We respect the importance of ongoing discussions with the local community, as the intent of US Forces is always to train with allies like Slovenia in a way that is neither disruptive to the environment, nor the local community,”* the Embassy said adding that executing the training schedule demands *“assured, predictable access to the facilities where troops can exercise specific capabilities essential to operational readiness, to include night live-fire.”* The Embassy also stressed that the bilateral relationship *“remains strong, and we enjoy extensive cooperation from the working to most senior levels on a wide variety of issues of mutual interest.”* It is noted that the US Army Europe Commander Lieutenant General Christopher Cavoli visited Slovenia last week for meetings with senior leaders on defense issues, with a large US delegation expected at the

Three Seas Initiative Summit in Ljubljana in June. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability. Although the Government is a minority one seeking compromise for survival, Sarec has been proved of being flexible in Slovenia's politics so far achieving to balance adequately between different political trends. Left party (Levica) 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. Opposition has filed a motion to oust Defense Minister from office but it is assessed that has little chances to succeed. However, there are several questions of Erjavec actions and decisions which affect Armed Forces function. The Government has to address several internal social issues (increase of minimum wage, health care, pensions etc). Border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia remains active with low scale skirmishes not be excluded periodically. Slovenia implies that the ongoing border dispute may affect its decision regarding Croatia's membership candidacy in Schengen Zone. 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. Withdrawal of US military forces from joint exercises in Slovenia had a negative impact on international defense profile as a reliable and professional partner.



TURKEY: May 17th, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu sent a letter to High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, EU member countries and the Foreign Ministers of the UN Security Council's permanent members regarding Turkey's drilling activities in eastern Mediterranean. According to contents of the letter obtained by Anadolu Agency, Cavusoglu underlined Turkey's political and legal position and said area in question lies entirely within Turkish continental shelf notified to the UN. Turkish flagged drillship Fatih's offshore operations area is located 75 kilometers (46.6 miles) off the west coast of the Island of Cyprus and drilling area has nothing to do with any of the Greek Cypriots' (GC) so-called license areas or Turkish Cypriots' licensed areas granted to Turkish Petroleum (TP), the letter said. Cavusoglu added that EU's press statement in support of the Greek Cypriots just for the sake of EU solidarity is not compatible with international law. He stressed that Turkey does not recognize the unilateral and illegitimate Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claims of the Greek Cypriots and stated that third parties should refrain from taking sides in overlapping maritime

boundary claims and they should not act as if they are a Court in rendering judgment on bilateral maritime boundaries. The Turkish Foreign Minister also said that there is no automatic claim that islands generate full maritime jurisdiction areas. He highlighted that the question of the entitlement of islands to maritime jurisdiction areas and their effect in delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas are completely separate issues of the Law of the Sea. Cavusoglu stated that Turkey has made its position on drillings clear since 2004 and registered it in the UN. He said the final maritime boundaries in that part of the Mediterranean can only be settled through agreements and not by infringing upon third parties' rights, to be concluded between relevant coastal states based on international law. The other method highlighted in the letter is third party solutions, namely international Courts or arbitration. The letter emphasized that overlapping maritime jurisdiction claims of the EU members, infringing on the legitimate rights of the third countries cannot be portrayed as the external borders of the EU and stated that such stance of the EU would be a gross violation of international law. Cavusoglu underlined that as far as Cyprus island and its western coast is concerned, maritime delimitation would only be possible after the political settlement on the island. He explicitly stressed in his letter to Mogherini that pending the comprehensive settlement, Turkey calls on the EU to play a constructive role and not to take side or attempt to validate one side's claims. Cavusoglu conveyed Turkey's dismay to his American counterpart Mike Pompeo regarding US State Department's press release on the same issue. In his letters, Cavusoglu underscored that as the country with

the longest continental coastline, Turkey has legitimate rights and vital interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey has been fully exercising its sovereign rights over its continental shelf in accordance with international law. He highlighted that Turkey stands ready today, as it has done in the past, to give its full support to ensuring a fair, equitable, and peaceful resolution to all pending issues including the equitable delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas with all relevant coastal States that Turkey recognizes and has diplomatic relations, in line with international law. The Foreign Minister pointed out that Greek Cypriots' unilateral hydrocarbon-related activities, disregarding the inalienable rights of the Turkish Cypriots, as the co-owners of the Island, on natural resources of the Island, jeopardize security and stability in the region. Cavusoglu stressed that unless the Greek Cypriots involve the Turkish Cypriots into the decision-making process regarding hydro-carbon resources or cease their unilateral hydro-carbon activities, Turkish drilling and survey vessels will also continue activities in the areas where the “*Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus*” [occupied part of Cyprus island by Turkish forces] granted licenses to TP in the south and east of the Island. He lastly underscored that Turkey will, as it has done in past, continue to act with prudence and in good faith, yet, saying Turkey should not be expected to sit idly and condone the ongoing violation of its rights and those of the Turkish Cypriots. (www.dailysabah.com)

- May 18th, Turkey is being pushed to take initiatives in Syria to ensure its national security as the threat near its border grows with People's Protection Units (YPG) fueling instability in the

war-torn country. The presence of the YPG along its borders is the utmost risk for Ankara's national interest. In the face of the threat near to its borders, Turkey has carried out two cross-border operations in the past three years and is preparing to launch another east of the Euphrates, which was later put on hold due to the prompt US pullout plans. However, Ankara is growing more impatient by the day as the US keeps stalling on its promises. In relation to the issue, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said on Thursday that the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) “*has the responsibility to look out, protect and ensure the security of the 82 million people of the nation. As long as terrorists are present in the north of Iraq and Syria, we will continue doing what is necessary like we did previously.*” Pointing out that Turkey will never allow a terror corridor to be established along its border, Akar underlined that Turkey will continue its fight against all kinds of terrorism resolutely. He added that the TSK has completed all its preparations for the imminent cross-border operation and is waiting for instructions from Ankara. After DAESH was cleared from the region, the YPG tightened its grip by establishing a de facto autonomous region in Syria. Turkey sees no difference between the PKK, a group also listed on US and EU terror lists. The US, however, opted to continue its military support for YPG by providing truckloads of military supplies and military training under the pretext of fighting DAESH, despite the warnings of its NATO ally. Russia also has been voicing its concerns about the repercussions of the US' support for the YPG, stressing that it will destabilize the region in the long run. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov on Thursday underlined that Syrian Kurds are

important for the political solution. Expressing his concerns regarding the US presence in the region, Ryabkov emphasized that it was a policy intentionally pursued by Washington to halt the efforts of preserving the territorial integrity of Syria. According to local sources speaking to Anadolu Agency (AA), a car bomb targeting the military council in the northern Syrian town of Manbij run by the YPG on Thursday was claimed by DAESH, which the US had declared defeated. Local sources also underscored that the YPG launched an operation on Thursday night under the pretext of fighting DAESH, setting fire to 200,000 square meters of a field in a district of eastern Syria's Deir el-Zour, where huge civilian protests of the organization have been taking place for some time. (www.dailysabah.com)

- May 19th, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said Turkey and Russia would jointly produce S-500 defense systems after Ankara's controversial purchase of the S-400 missile defense system from Moscow. Turkey's push to buy the S-400s has further strained the already tense relations with the US, which has repeatedly warned Ankara of the risks, including sanctions, if it goes ahead with the purchase. *"There is absolutely no question of [Turkey] taking a step back from the S-400 purchase. That is a done deal,"* Erdogan said on Saturday in Istanbul. *"There will be joint production of the S-500 after the S-400,"* Erdogan told an audience of young people in reply to a question. Ties between Turkey and the US, both NATO allies, have frayed over multiple issues, including American support for Syrian Kurdish fighters viewed as "terrorists" by Ankara and the US failure to extradite a Muslim preacher blamed for the 2016

coup attempt against Erdogan. Washington says the deal with Moscow is a threat to Western defense. In April, the US suspended the delivery of F-35 stealth fighter jets to Turkey in a bid to halt the purchase. Turkish pilots are in the US receiving training on the F-35s, manufactured by Lockheed Martin. Ankara is expected to buy a total of 100 jets. Erdogan said Turkey conducted technical studies amid US concerns over the compatibility of the S-400s and the F-35s but found there were no issues. He also insisted *"sooner or later"* Turkey would receive the F-35 jets. Despite the threat of sanctions, Erdogan repeated that the S-400s were expected to be delivered in July 2019. *"They [US] are passing the ball around in the midfield now, showing some reluctance. But sooner or later, we will receive the F-35s. [The US] not delivering them is not an option,"* he said. (www.aljazeera.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Deterioration of Turkish – US relations is a major concern for Turkey threatening its political and economic stability. Purchase of Russian air-defense system S-400 is unacceptable for the US administration threatening directly Turkey with sanctions. 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. 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. It cannot be excluded dramatic developments regarding Turkish economy. Besides, Turkish society looks like being fed up with autocratic practices of Erdogan and this was a key point during last local elections. Revote of municipal elections in Istanbul raises questions for the whole process and transparency of procedure. Free and fair elections are under question in Turkey taking into consideration that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and ruling AKP fully controls Justice system and state’s institutions. Scheduled for June 23rd, 2019 elections in Istanbul will be a “stress test” for Turkish democratic principles and values. However, it is proved that loss of Istanbul municipality – the biggest Turkish city and trade hub which was under AKP control last 15 years – was a “bitter defeat” for Erdogan. 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. Although Turkey maintains its strategic goal of entering the EU, the EU sends strong messages of suspending the EU – Turkey accession talks. 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. 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 reacted eventually by sending its drillship Fatih (accompanied by three other ships) to show its presence and to claim its interests. It was an expected reaction and it is assessed that Turkey entered in the East Mediterranean geostrategic and energy rivalry showing determination by action. The cost so far, for Turkey, is zero achieving simultaneously to question Cypriot sovereign rights. International reactions (US, EU etc) has limited in a couple of “warm words of support and sympathy” to Cyprus leaving initiative of action to Turkey. 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

 Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk

 Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict