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**Hermes Institute of
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SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE TO THOSE WHO SHAPE THE FUTURE

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

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

“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE

“HERMES” Institute of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy (“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE) is an independent, non – governmental, non – profit organization, consisting of scholars dedicated in the research and analysis of international affairs in regional and global level. The Institute aims at providing objective, scientific, and reliable research analysis through a variety of studies contributing effectively and constructively in the public dialogue and the evolution of scientific knowledge.

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ALBANIA: May 4th, “Defender Europe 21,” a major multinational military exercise led by the US, has kicked off in Albania. The exercise will be conducted in more than a dozen of countries, with 26 nations participating in it under the US leadership. More than 28,000 forces have been deployed for exercise in total, and 16 countries will exercise. Training areas will include Albania, the Balkans, the Baltics, the Black Sea and Africa. (www.exit.al)



The US General and Commander of the US European Command, Tod D. Wolters in his welcoming speech on the occasion of “Defender Europe 21” exercise

(Photo source: www.mod.gov.al)

- May 5th, European Commissioner Oliver Varhelyi has argued that Albania has met all EU conditions and is ready to start accession talks, but North Macedonia still needs to get Bulgaria’s approval. (www.exit.al)

- May 7th, the Albanian Parliament set up an inquiry committee to examine a request by the ruling Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS) to dismiss President Ilir Meta. According to PS, the President has incited violence and undermined the country’s unity during the electoral campaign of April 25th, 2021 elections. (www.exit.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

After its clean victory in the parliamentary elections of April 25th, 2021, ruling PS has launched procedure for dismissal of the state’s President, Ilir Meta. It is a fact that Meta, the state’s symbol of unity and democratic rule, engaged actively in Albanian politics and more specific in the pre-electoral campaign of the parliamentary elections. However, dismissing of the state’s President is an act which rather maintains political tension in the country adding new disputes. Albania needs political stability and unity with the challenge of the EU accession talks ahead. Moreover, after a long political crisis it is time the ruling PS to show maturity and avoid acts of political revenge. Dismantling the Albanian President could become a source of new political instability and uncertainty. The new PS Government should focus on intensifying its actions for fighting corruption, money laundering and smuggling (drugs, weapons, people etc). Besides, it is urgent Albanian political elite to clean allegations that it enjoys enmeshed interests with organized crime.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

May 6th, according to the High Representative of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko, latest report at the state level, there is complete stagnation, evidenced by the poor legislative output of the BiH Council of Ministers (CoM) and the BiH Parliamentary Assembly. During the current mandate, apart from budget acts, only one new law has been fully adopted. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- May 7th, “Bosnian Constitution says that every constituent people in Bosnia and Herzegovina is

entitled to the right to their representatives and the right to protection of vital national interest, but no one can impose the will of the minority on the will of the majority and make the parliamentary democracy meaningless,” leader of the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA) party Bakir Izetbegovic told N1, commenting on political talks on electoral reform.(www.ba.N1info.com)

- May 8th, the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, stated today that Serbia will allocate from 10 to 12 million Euros of aid for the Republika Srpska's Municipalities of Kozarska Dubica, Kostajnica, Nevesinje and Drvar. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- May 9th, the Ambassador of Russia to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Igor Kalabukhov, said that the Office of High Representative (OHR) had become a brake on the development of Bosnia. Kalabukhov reminded of the position of Russia on the closure of the OHR in BiH, which he called an outdated instrument of the international community, but did not say that this position of Russia would stop the intention to appoint a new High Representative in BiH. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country is in political stagnation due to the complicated and cumbersome decision-making process. Of course such situation strongly affects not only citizens' ordinary life, but also the country's strategic interests. Bosnia needs a strong central Government which will accelerate legislative acts setting the necessary legal framework for reforming the country's institutions. Due to this uncomfortable situation

the country is reaching an economic, social, political and security stalemate which could threaten Bosnia's cohesion and existence. It is the international community's commitment and will which maintain the country alive. Under these conditions there is fertile soil for nationalist rhetoric and hatred between the three entities of the country. Neighboring countries (namely Croatia and Serbia) are intervening – openly or covertly – in Bosnian affairs strengthening national disputes, keeping ethnic division alive and preventing reconciliation of peoples. Despite voices of dissolution of Bosnia the scenario is far from reality. A potential dissolution of the country could provoke a dominos of conflicts in the wider region of Southeastern Europe threatening its stability and peace. Bosnia is far from joining the EU since the country suffers from corruption, absence of rule of law, difficulties in respect of human rights, weak public administration, democratic deficit and its economic performance is one of the lowest in Europe.



BULGARIA: May 4th,

Bulgaria declared another Russian diplomat a “*persona non grata*” and asked the Russian authorities for full assistance in investigating the explosions in Bulgarian arms depots, the destruction of physical evidence in a fire and the poisoning of three Bulgarian citizens so that the perpetrators could be identified. (www.novinite.com)

- May 5th, President Rumen Radev handed the third exploratory mandate for the formation of a BSP Government, but its leader, Korneliya Ninova, returned it. (www.novinite.com)

- May 5th, Bulgaria will hold a snap parliamentary election on July 11th, 2021 after a third and final attempt to form a Government following April 4th, 2021 polls, which led to a fragmented Parliament, failed the President Rumen Radev announced. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country will hold early elections on July 11th, 2021 following three failed attempts of forming a Government. Political instability and uncertainty is maintained in the country, while a caretaker Government appointed by the President, Rumen Radev will take over duties. It should be noted that it is assessed that Radev is trying to take advantage of current political situation to increase control of power and to establish his own institutional mechanism. The EU is pushing Sofia to forward its institutional reforms for establishing strong public administration, rule of law, transparency and accountability of public sector and democratic rule. The country has made significant progress in the establishment of the legal framework to strengthen state's institutions and it is a matter of political will to see tangible results. Bulgaria – North Macedonia relations remain tense due to Sofia's decision to block Skopje progress of accession negotiations. Moscow and Sofia relations are considered tense. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). Military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force.



CROATIA: May 4th, parliamentary opposition parties filed a joint motion to launch a vote of no confidence for Health Minister Vili

Beros, Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatska - SDP) leader Pedja Grbin said on Tuesday. The reason Grbin cited are “*accumulated problems in the healthcare sector and scandals related to the Minister.*” (www.hr.n1info.com)

- May 5th, the Krsko nuclear power plant (NEK), co-owned by Slovenia and Croatia, has been reconnected to the power grid after a regular outage that lasted slightly over a month, the company announced. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- May 6th, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic condemned hate speech used by a group of football fans in Borovo Selo near the eastern town of Vukovar, underscoring that there is no justification for last Sunday's incident and that there is no room for intolerance in Croatian society. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- May 8th, Croatian President Zoran Milanovic said that Croatia's decision to increase its troop contingent in Kosovo was not an act of provocation against Serbia. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- May 9th, Serbia's Interior Minister Aleksandar Vulin is promoting the defeated Great Serbia policy and making groundless objections against Croatia, Foreign Minister Gordan Grlic Radman said. He also recalled that Croatia has always supported and supports Serbia's integration into Europe; however, he warns that “*the journey to Europe goes via Croatia.*” (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Opposition parties filed a motion of no-confidence against the Health Minister, Vili Beros due to his failure on dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the no-confidence motion has

little chances to succeed, it is assessed that the opposition is raising its voice due to the coming local elections scheduled for May 16th, 2021. Tension has been increased lately with Serbia due to Croatia's decision to strengthen its military presence in Kosovo within the NATO mission. Belgrade considered this decision as a hostile one, but Zagreb defended it in the name of its obligations towards the Alliance. Besides, Zagreb did not hesitate to remind Belgrade that the Serbian EU path "goes via Croatia," sending a clear message that Serbia should compromise with Zagreb. The country continues to interfere in Bosnian affairs seeking to promote its national interests. Accession in the Schengen Zone and Eurozone is a strategic goal since it will benefit the state regarding economy, trade, and security. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: - May 3rd, Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar criticized President Nikos Anastasiades for having an "anachronistic and domineering mentality" over references in his Easter message to his Turkish Cypriot "compatriots." (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 5th, Attorney-General Giorgos Savvides has filed an appeal at the Supreme Court against a resolution passed by Parliament calling on him and his Deputy Savvas Angelides to recuse themselves from the process of assessing the interim findings of an inquiry into the controversial citizenship by investment program. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 7th, in a press conference in Geneva on Thursday, the Spokesperson for the UN

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Stephane Dujarric said the SG will reconvene in a few months after more discussions, another round of informal talks. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Following the 5+1 informal meeting in Geneva the President, Nikos Anastasiades has informed his EU counterparts seeking to gain support for the Cypriot proposals. Besides, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres announced a second round of informal talks in a few months. It is not certain that the parties joining talks share the same optimism with Guterres. Turkish Cypriot community backed by Turkey appears steady in its stance, advocating the solution of two independent states. However, there is a sense that the final goal for Turkish Cypriots (and Turkey) is a loose federation with extended autonomy to both communities and the two states solution is nothing more than a "negotiation card." The country is moving towards parliamentary elections scheduled for May 30th, 2021. Cyprus is strengthening its relations with regional states following a foreign policy of multilateral cooperation in several fields. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize). As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: May 5th, Greek Foreign Ministry sources dismissed the accusations of a Turkish Government official who claimed that the country is violating the rights of its large Muslim

minority, saying the community is “flourishing.” (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 6th, Greece’s Navy received the first maintained S-70B helicopter from the US manufacturer Lockheed Martin Rotary, Mission Systems and Aeroservices. The inclusion of the 11 Aegean Hawk S-70 helicopters of the Navy in the program was made possible under the intergovernmental agreement between Greece and the US. (www.ekathimerini.com)



Delivery of the first S-70 helicopter of the Hellenic Navy after completion of its general inspection

(Photo source: www.hellenicnavy.gr)

- May 7th, the Greek far-right member of the European Parliament, Ioannis Lagos arrested last month in Belgium can be extradited to Greece to serve a 13-year prison sentence, the Brussels Prosecutor’s office announced. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The country is getting gradually back to normality, while they are expected increased tourist flows during the summer. Greece’s economy is based on tourism and COVID-19 has hit badly the country’s economic performances. Despite provocative rhetoric of Turkey, tension between Athens and Ankara remains low. Greece

implements an ambitious project for strengthening the Armed Forces seeking to modernize the Navy and Air Force power by purchasing new frigates and fighter jets. Besides, a new crisis with Turkey could emerge anytime.



KOSOVO: May 4th, a Spokesperson for Kosovo Government, Rozafa Kelmendi said genocide charges against Serbia would be filed to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) before the end of 2022, adding such a move needed thorough preparation. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 4th, in its 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in Kosovo, the US State Department highlighted the pressure on media, impunity for public opposition to the Specialist Chambers for Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) war crimes, return of property confiscated after the 1998-1999 war and attacks on minority groups among other examples of human rights violations. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 6th, the EU’s Envoy for the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations, Miroslav Lajcak said on Thursday that an agreement with Serbia would bring Kosovo an EU candidate country status. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti implements a political agenda which could further deteriorate relations with Serbia. Not only he rejects dialogue, but he has started to promote actions which could set insurmountable obstacles in the dialogue process for resolving the Kosovo issue. In this context, Prishtina appears ready to file

charges for genocide to Belgrade; an action which would cancel any effort for talks with Serbia. The EU's Envoy for the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue, Miroslav Lajcak has sent a strong message to Prishtina that the European prospect of Kosovo is possible only after normalization of relations with Serbia. Kosovo needs urgently institutional reforms especially in the fields of economy, rule of law, public administration, justice and democratic rule. Organized crime, corruption, money laundering, weak public administration, absence of rule of law, controlled justice, transactions between politicians and criminals are persistent "open sores" for Kosovo. As long as Kosovo status is undefined it will suffer from restricted sovereignty and political instability and uncertainty.



MOLDOVA: May 7th, the Head of the EU Delegation to Moldova Peter Michalko said the snap parliamentary elections are a method by which the citizens can contribute to reforming the justice sector by electing a credible Parliament that would start this process. According to the diplomat, if there is a legislature that would support a reformist Government, the EU will continue to offer financial support to Moldova, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- May 7th, it is not yet known when the elections to the People's Assembly of Gagauzia will be held. A new date was to be set after the previously agreed date of May 16th, 2021 was cancelled following the declaring of a state of emergency in Moldova. (www.ipn.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Snap parliamentary elections have been scheduled in Moldova on July 11th, 2021. It is a significant political victory for the President Maia Sandu who has the chance to win these elections, achieving to control political power of the country. It is not a secret that the state's President has limited powers and competencies and only by controlling the Parliament and the Government, Sandu could promote its political plan. It seems that Moldovan political parties have accepted the new political reality and they are preparing for the elections. Under this prism, it could be said that call for snap elections has contributed in reducing political tension in the country. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that Moldova is exiting by this political crisis strongly traumatized in institutional and constitutional level. Russia has not reacted yet in Moldovan political situation but one should expect Moscow's action since it is threatened its influence in its "soft underbelly." Actually, Moldova has become a field of rivalry between the west and Russia, since the EU and the US are openly promoting the establishment of a pro-western Government in the country aiming to facilitate Moldova's Euro-Atlantic integration. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: May 3rd, the Chief of the Montenegro Armed Forces General Staff, Milutin Djurovic said in an interview for Dan that he will especially advocate for the continuation of the reforms of the Armed Forces, professionalization and respect for the Code of Military Ethics. (www.cdm.me)

- May 4th, it is not up to the EU to consider Montenegro's financial situation, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood, Oliver Varhelyi said who is on a working visit to Montenegro. *"We are monitoring the reforms of prosecutorial laws and have already talked about it with Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapić,"* he said. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Montenegrin Government appears stable despite tense relations with the President, Milo Djukanovic and main opposition party DPS. The ruling coalition is seeking to get financial support by the EU for the Montenegrin debt to China and this could strongly affect on the Government's political orientation. In other words, it is assessed that the EU could help Montenegro under certain conditions and commitments! The European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood, Oliver Varhelyi's visit to Podgorica is included in this framework and it is assessed that the Chinese debt was the main topic of discussion. It will not be a surprise if a change in Montenegrin external policy is recorded in the near future. Montenegro needs concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Montenegro is closer to the EU accession than any other Western Balkan country but current political situation puts at risk its European future.



NORTH MACEDONIA: May 6th, the US Ambassador in North Macedonia Kate

Byrnes said that corruption is the biggest challenge the country faces, as it undermines the governance and the economic competitiveness and prospects of young people. (www.republika.mk)

- May 6th, the problems that Skopje has recently been facing with Sofia because of historical issues could force EU to hold the first Inter-governmental Conference with Albania alone, instead of both countries, the EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, Oliver Varhelyi said. (www.euronews.al)

- May 7th, following Friday's meeting with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) leader Hristijan Mickoski, President Stevo Pendarovski reiterated his position that amnesty for people who committed an unprecedented crime in modern Europe is out of the question, because their guilt in that process was indisputably established in the trial. Nevertheless he said that his position is that if there is new evidence that was previously unknown and that could change the process, the case should be re-opened, and that decision should be made by the Court, and not by a political factor. (www.republika.mk)

- May 8th, Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani said Saturday he does not believe North Macedonia and Albania will be separated on the EU path and the country should not give up on the possibility of an intergovernmental conference in June. Moreover he advocated for the start of talks with Bulgaria even with a caretaker Government of the

latter, since the decision is a technical one.
(www.republika.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension is maintained in North Macedonia due to constant efforts of main opposition party VMRO-DPMNE to polarize political climate achieving to topple the Government. Besides, the ruling coalition maintains a fragile majority in the Parliament which encourages VMRO-DPMNE to follow an “aggressive” policy towards ruling SDSM. Leaks that Albania will start accession talks with the EU separately from North Macedonia has frustrated the latter’s top officials. But it is a fact that Skopje is in a difficult situation regarding their dispute with Bulgaria which has blockade North Macedonia’s accession progress. From the very first moment “HERMES” has suggested that Skopje should seek to a “decent compromise” with Bulgaria in order to overcome the deadlock. Acceleration of Albanian accession process without North Macedonia simultaneously could record a significant political cost for the Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev and his cabinet. Currently, Skopje are forced to negotiate with Sofia in a rather worse conditions than before and it is assessed that situation will become worse for North Macedonia as long as a mutual accepted resolution is delayed. The Government has assessed situation with Bulgaria falsely making the usual mistake of Balkan countries; that international pressure (namely the EU, US) will force Bulgaria to step back resolving situation in favor of Skopje. Corruption reigns in the country, while the establishment of rule of law is another challenge for the state.



ROMANIA: May 5th, Romania has satisfactorily implemented only five of the 18 recommendations outlined in the previous reports of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), according to GRECO’s latest report on Romania consulted by Hotnews.ro. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

It seems that the ruling coalition enjoys stability. The Government should focus on state’s reforms for fighting corruption, modernizing public administration and strengthening rule of law. Romania enjoys advanced upgrade in the US and NATO strategic and operational planning due to its geographical position located close to Russia. One should keep in mind that Romania is the Eastern bastion of NATO in a rather unstable region. The Alliance keeps strengthening its presence in Romania by deploying modern weapons and troops. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO.



SERBIA: May 3rd, Serbia’s Parliament Speaker Ivica Dacic confirmed the inter-party dialogue on election conditions mediated by the European Parliament would not start before June, which would be less than a year ahead of the 2022 presidential, local and early parliamentary vote. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 3rd, Aleksandar Vucic, Serbia’s President, continues strengthening Belgrade ties with Moscow and Beijing by meeting their

Ambassadors to discuss further economic cooperation. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 8th, Serbia opposes any initiatives to change borders in the Balkans and accepted those that were established in 1991, Serbia's President, Aleksandar Vucic, said during his Saturday visit to the northern Bosnian village of Donja Gradina. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling coalition has achieved to downgrade the inter-party dialogue with the opposition by delaying the whole process. Moreover, opposition appears divided failing to present concrete proposals for the improvement of internal political climate. It could be said that opposition did not actually believe in EU mediation for a sincere dialogue with ruling coalition, but rather in European intervention for political turmoil and finally a political change in its favor; an "orange revolution" for toppling the Government and the President Aleksandar Vucic long reign. Taking this fact into consideration, it cannot be excluded the possibility of social turmoil seeking to destabilize the ruling coalition. Vucic is skillfully balance between the west, Russia and China. He gives promises and hopes to all of them declaring the doctrine of "neutrality" as a tool of peace and stability. Besides, Serbia appears as a reasonable voice in Southeast Europe rejecting any idea of border change which could destabilize the region. Apart from that, Belgrade is ready for dialogue with Kosovo transferring the burden of talks to Prishtina. Actually, Vucic talks with Brussels while the Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti is the one who aggravates the process. The European future of Serbia remains stuck without encouraging signs for the near future.

Corruption, organized crime, public administration accountability, media freedom are the main internal challenges for the country. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.



SLOVENIA: May 6th, MPs from the coalition parties tabled a motion to dismiss Parliament Speaker Igor Zorcic, with the argument that he had joined at the end of March a group of unaffiliated MPs, which is not part of the coalition. The Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS), New Slovenia – Christian Democrats (Nova Slovenija – Krščanski Demokrati - NSi) and Modern Centre Party (Stranka Modernega Centra - SMC) filed the motion a day after the ruling SDS's deputy group leader Danijel Krivec announced the coalition had collected 47 signatures to urge Zorcic to step down. The first attempt on March 30th, 2021 failed as only 45 voted for the dismissal, one short. (www.sta.si)

- May 7th, MPs will vote on an impeachment motion against Prime Minister Janez Jansa at a parliamentary session starting on May 17th, 2021 the College of deputy leaders decided. The motion was filed in early April by the center-left opposition List of Marjan Sarec (Lista Marjana Šarca - LMS), Social Democrats (Socialni Demokrati - SD), Left (Levica) and the Party of Alenka Bratusek (Stranka Alenke Bratušek - SAB), which accuse Jansa of violating several articles of the Constitution and laws, pertaining to healthcare, media, prosecution and human and constitutional rights. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Prime Minister, Janez Jansa is heading of a minority Government which enjoys fragile stability. Current political situation is threatening the ruling coalition viability and the impeachment motion against Jansa could destabilize the Government. Besides, the ruling coalition's Parliament control is in the hands of a few independent MPs who have left the former ruling coalition partner, DeSUS. Slovenian Armed Forces are incapable for war operations; a major problem for the state's defense and security capacity. The state pays special attention in upgrading the Armed Forces capabilities and in this context has approved a 780 million Euros armament project aiming to modernize them. Procurement of transport aircrafts and helicopters has been set as a priority.



TURKEY: May 3rd, Foreign Minister of Libya's interim Government, Najla al-Manqoush has called for the departure of foreign forces and mercenaries from the North African country as it heads towards elections later this year. Al-Manqoush urged Turkey to implement UN Security Council resolutions demanding the repatriation of more than 20,000 foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libya. (www.aljazeera.com)

- May 4th, Iraq summoned Turkey's envoy in Baghdad to protest the visit by the Defense Minister, Hulusi Akar to a military base in northern Iraq as Turkish troops continue a cross-border offensive against Kurdish fighters there. (www.aljazeera.com)

- May 5th, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz have discussed bilateral ties in a call, the second conversation between the two leaders in less than a month. (www.aljazeera.com)

- May 5th, Egyptian and Turkish officials have met in Cairo for talks aimed at resetting ties between the two regional powers after years of enmity. The two-day "political consultations" between the two states were chaired by Hamdi Loza, Egypt's Deputy Foreign Minister, and his Turkish counterpart Sedat Onal. (www.aljazeera.com)

- May 6th, Turkey has tested its first 1,500-hp locally-made tank engine - named Batu - successfully, the head of the country's Defense Industries Authority (SSB) said on Wednesday. The engine, developed by the Turkish firm BMC Power for various tanks, armored vehicles and machines, was launched successfully the President of SSB, Ismail Demir has written on social media. (www.aa.com.tr)

- May 6th, Turkey's Central Bank held its key interest rate steady at 19% as expected on Thursday and repeated a pledge to keep it above inflation, which the bank expects to cool after having risen beyond 17% as the lira depreciated. The lira has shed 13% since mid-March when President Recep Tayyip Erdogan shocked markets by appointing Sahap Kavcioglu, who had been an outspoken critic of Turkey's tight monetary policy, as central bank governor. (www.aljazeera.com)

- May 7th, several senior Turkish officials condemned a raid on Friday by Israeli Police on

the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem. (www.aa.com.tr)

- May 9th, Turkey wants an update of the 2016 refugee deal with EU and the continuation of positive relations with the bloc, said the Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister, Faruk Kaymakci on Saturday. (www.aa.com.tr)

- May 9th, the Armed Unmanned Surface Vessel (AUSV), the first platform of the ULAQ series developed in cooperation with Turkish defense industry companies, is ready to launch missiles.



Armed Unmanned Surface Vessel (AUSV)

(Photo source: www.ares.global)

The prototype production of Turkey's first AUSV, which was started to be manufactured in Antalya by Ares Shipyard and Meteksan Defense three years ago, has been completed.

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey is implementing a turn on its foreign policy by approaching regional states and seeking to warm its frozen relations with them. In this context, Ankara is systematically approaching Cairo in an effort to restore its badly damaged relations with the North African country. Moreover, Turkey is trying to restore contact with Saudi Arabia, after a long time of coldness between the two countries following the assassination of the Saudi journalist, Jamal


Khashoggi back in 2018. Needless to say that both Egypt and Saudi Arabia are US allies. Turkey is in difficult position and is obliged to show compromise if it really wish to warm its relations with both countries. However, Cairo and Riyadh are reluctant on the Ankara's approach since trust has been lost after a series of incidents. In the same time, Turkey refuses to withdraw its military forces (and its Syrian mercenaries) from Libya claiming that its army was actually invited in the country contributing in the peace effort. Ankara needs its strong influence in Libya seeking to strengthen its position in Eastern Mediterranean. The strong ties between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt and Greece and Saudi Arabia have alarmed Turkey which realizes that military power is useful for promoting national interests, but it is not enough. Turkey is expected to strengthen its efforts for restoring ties with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, while approaching of UAE will not be a surprise. Turkish Lira remains weak exposing the country's economy into risks. The PKK militants consist a permanent threat of Turkish security. Thus, the Turkish Armed Forces launch military operations not only in the Turkish territory, but also in the Iraqi one seeking to eliminate their bases. Turkish authorities continue to violate human rights, media freedom and democratic rule. Arrests of political opponents, journalists who criticize the ruling AKP and political activists is a common practice. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Turkey could not be considered as a democracy but rather as a "hybrid democracy" since the President adopts authoritarian practices.


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NOTE

 *Stable situation. No security risk.*

 *Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.*

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

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

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