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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. However Greece enjoys its own weekly review for a more detailed presentation of its current affairs (GREECE AT A GLANCE).

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

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ALBANIA: June 23rd, ethnic minorities in Albania that make up 20% or more of their municipalities of residence will be able to use their language in Government offices. The draft-decision prepared by the Albanian Government stipulates that ethnic minorities must file a request with the municipality and the municipal council will rule on it within 60 days. The request must be signed by at least 1% of the ethnic minority population. If the request is approved, the municipality will provide translations into the language of the requesting ethnic minority for ethnic minority legal rights, transparency program access, public consultation sessions, requests and complaints filed with the municipality, citizen initiatives. Additionally, the municipality will install road signs translated into the ethnic minority's language. The draft-decision comes within the framework of the 15 conditions set out by the EU, which Albania must meet before it can hold the first intergovernmental conference. One of the conditions is the approval of bylaws on the Law on National Minorities. (www.exit.al)

- June 24th, Turkish influence in Albania has begun to raise concerns in EU institutions. During a discussion session on Albania that took place on Friday in the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, a number of MEPs criticized the close relationship between the Albanian and Turkish Government. These concerns were in the context of Turkish influence in the Balkans and the persecution of those accused of being involved in the Gulenist movement. Three MEPs from the Committee expressed doubts about Albania's will and desire to join the EU. French MEP Thierry Mariani said that Albania is a key

part of Turkish influence in the Balkans and that Turkey has strong ties to the "*radical part of Kosovo*." He also drew attention to the kidnap and extradition of five Turkish teachers in Kosovo and one in Albania. "*Albania has the right to have good relations with Turkey, but we do not think that the policy chosen at the moment in this regard is in line with European standards*," he said. German MEP Zimnok Bernhard said that Turkey is using Albania as a base for expansion towards Europe. "*Turks are working towards a new Ottoman Empire. They are doing this through increased armaments and through religion...I see it as a problem*," Bernhard said. He also said he does not believe that Albania will implement the necessary reforms as "*they are not a part of our European values*." Bernhard called for a stop to the "*flow of money into Albania, and the accession process*." He said that "*Albania in the EU will bring big and unnecessary problems*." Hungarian MEP Katalin Cseh called the relationship between Albania and Turkey "*disturbing*," particularly in the way it developed after the failed 2016 coup d'état. Cseh also mentioned the extradition of perceived Gulenists who risk persecution and arrest if they enter Turkey. "*I want to talk about one last case, a well-documented case. Turkish citizen Selami Simsek was arrested at Tirana airport and imprisoned for using forged documents. Although he was released on March 9th, 2020 Police held him for hours before sending him to a center for illegal immigrants. Although Mr Simsek applied for asylum, the status of his application and his whereabouts are being kept secret by the Albanian authorities*," Cseh said. In response to their concerns, Angelina Eichhorst, the Director for Europe and Central Asia in the European Commission said that the concerns of MEPs are

somewhat exaggerated and should be seen in context, emphasizing that some 90% of Albanians are in favor of EU membership. She claimed that the Commission is monitoring the relationship and would report on it if there were any real concerns. Eichhorst did not address the extradition of Turkish citizens to Turkey without following due process. (www.exit.al.com)

- June 25th, the US State Department has noted that “corruption and barriers to information sharing among Government agencies, insufficient intra-agency coordination, and a poorly functioning judicial system, continue to hinder Albania’s law enforcement efforts at all levels. The remarks were made as a part of the 2019 Country Report on Terrorism, compiled by the Department. Despite these issues, they found that law enforcement had increased efforts to counter potential terrorist threats through close cooperation with US agencies and INTERPOL. There were also “several successful interdictions of known or suspected terrorists.” It noted the alleged foiling of a potential attack planned by Iranian agents against MEK members living in Albania. Current threats to the country include FTFs returning from Syria and Iraq, Albanian youth being radicalized, and the threat of Iran against the controversial residence of Iranian opposition group MEK in Manze near Durrës. The Department noted that Albania was continuing to take steps to enhance border security, to detect and deny entry to terrorists and comply with international standards to improve the screening of air passengers. In terms of Countering the Financing of Terrorism, the Department reported that Albania has scored “low effectiveness” in three immediate areas including confiscation, terrorist finance investigation and

prosecution, and proliferation finance sanctions. While in June 2019, the Government enforced legislation to combat this, the report said further regulations and actions need to be taken so it can actually be implemented effectively. (www.exit.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Government tried to downgrade the 15 conditions Albania should meet before starting of accession negotiations on first quarter of 2021. The fact is that Albania should fulfill them and there is a lot of work ahead if it really seeks to reach the deadlines. It is assessed that under current political instability it is rather difficult the Government to accelerate reforms on minority rights, media freedom, fight against corruption and organized crime, justice, public administration and economy. Social and political unrest could erupt at any time. Albania is in a long constitutional and institutional crisis and this situation strengthens political instability and uncertainty. Above all, it should be underlined that corruption, organized crime (and especially links of state’s politics with organized crime), money laundering and smuggling remain as “open sores” for the country. Turkish influence in Albania is under the EU microscope as a potential challenge of its cohesion and regional stability.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

June 22nd, the only necessary and swift measure concerning migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina is extraditing them to their countries of origin as soon as their identities are confirmed, Bosnia’s Serb Presidency member Milorad Dodik said on Sunday, following the session of his Alliance of

Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD) executive board. *“We demand full sterilization from migrants on our territories and securing a full safety of our people,”* Dodik told the reporters, adding that Republika Srpska, Bosnia’s Serb-majority region, will not allow any reception centers for migrants to be set up on its territory. *“It is unacceptable that some western institutions send demands more and more often to have the migrant issue distributed across Bosnia and Herzegovina. We reject that and we will not take part in that,”* he underlined. Dodik’s statement comes amid a new wave of migrant arrivals to Bosnia, in the wake of the relaxed coronavirus restriction measures across the region and end of the lockdown. After entering the country’s eastern border, the migrants move to its northwest hoping they would cross the border with the European Union and reach their final destinations across Europe. But, as Croatia keeps its borders closed for illegal migrants, they are stranded in the towns near the Bosnia - Croatia border, mostly accommodated in a few internationally-funded migrant centers but also occupying public areas in urban zones. The authorities of the northwestern Una-Sana Canton (USK) recently addressed the European Union officials, expressing concerns about the temporary migrant camps set up in the canton’s urban zones and demanding their shutdown. But, the warnings they would close the camps in the city and open another open-air camp for migrants modelled after the infamous *“Vucjak camp,”* which was closed last year under the pressure of international organizations, led the European Commission’s officials to threaten with cutting the financial support for the migration management in Bosnia. *“The Commission expects the cantonal authorities to respect the domestic legislation and the*

authority of the competent state institutions, and to facilitate their activities and those of international partners. This is the only way to ensure the security of citizens of your Canton in the current situation. Should this not be the case, the Commission will reconsider its assistance in the area of migration management that Bosnia and Herzegovina and in particular the Una-Sana Canton have been benefiting so far,” said a letter that the EC’s Commissioner Christian Danielsson wrote to the Head of USK Government, Mustafa Ruznic. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- June 25th, the Republika Srpska (RS) bought three Russian *“ANSAT”* helicopters for the needs of its Police, and the first will be delivered to RS in September, announced member of Presidency of BiH, Milorad Dodik, The Srpska Times reports. *“Despite all the pressure from Western partners to prevent this procurement, we still carried it out,”* said Dodik. In January, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of RS announced the selection of helicopter suppliers for around 22 million euro, and the company *“Russian Helicopters”* was listed as the only bidder. These are three *“ANSAT”* light helicopters. Delivery of light helicopters from the Russian city of Kazan is expected in September this year, in May 2021 and January 2022, the Russian agency writes. RS Helicopter Service currently has three *“CA-341/342”* Aerospatiale Gazelle and one *“Bell 206 Jet Ranger”* helicopters. This service provides medical evacuation and transport in RS, assists in the operations of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and trains pilots. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- June 28th, Bosnia’s political system suffers from patronage, conflicts of interest and corruption while public trust in institutions is low, the Head of the OSCE Mission in Bosnia, Kathleen

Kavalec, said at a session of the Krug 99 association of independent intellectuals on Sunday. *“The functioning of Parliaments is problematic, and citizens’ trust in politicians, political parties, elections and public institutions is low. Unfortunately, we face a lack of serious policy debate between citizens and politicians, and internal party democracies are underdeveloped,”* Kavalec said. She said that this also applies to issues such as the barriers women and youth face regarding their participation in politics, as well as financial responsibility and decision-making within political parties. She added that Bosnia’s political system suffers from *“patronage, conflict of interest and corruption which rarely anyone is held responsible for.”* Kavalec welcomed the recent adoption of the state budget by the Presidency, expressing hope that the Parliament will soon adopt it as well, arguing that this will enable the country to secure a budget for the local elections, which are to take place in November 2020. She noted that some political leaders have, prior to the adoption of the budget, argued that the financing of the election should not be secured before, as they argued, the illegal and illegitimate structure of the Central Election Commission (CEC) is revised. She pointed out that the process of appointing new CEC members has shaken relations within the ruling coalition but that it is an issue that the Court should decide on and that, unless it decides otherwise, all appointed CEC members are full members of the Commission. Political parties have a right to express their opinion on the work of institutions and propose their preferred candidates to top positions and they may submit complaints regarding the activities of other political parties within those institutions, she said. *“But there should also be a clear boundary - the functioning*

and independent nature of institutions - especially institutions that are as important as the CEC - must be unconditionally guaranteed,” Kavalec stressed. She said the OSCE is prepared to work with political parties and the Parliaments within Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as with the CEC, on the implementation of the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) through amendments to bylaws. She argued that systemic shortcomings in legislation, bylaws and existing practices that were identified by the ODIHR in their final reports following the 2010, 2014 and 2018 general elections have put the elections at risk of irregularities and manipulation. This does not necessarily put the overall credibility of the election, but recurring irregularities may affect the outcome in cases where the winning margin is negligible, she said. Kavalec pointed out that citizens’ trust in democratic institutions depends on the real and perceived integrity of the electoral process. *“Without that, the long-term stability of democratic institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot be guaranteed,”* she said, arguing that this is especially important for Bosnia because disinterest among citizens continues; the political process will increasingly be jeopardized by patronage and nepotism. While political parties have already done a lot regarding this issue, a lot more needs to be done, including the implementation of ODIHR recommendations, as well as the GRECO recommendations of the Council of Europe regarding the financing of political parties, she said. *“This is possible with committed political leadership. The recent agreement on the elections in Mostar is proof that this is feasible,”* she said. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

Latest agreements on 2020 state's budget and local elections in Mostar have created an encouraging atmosphere for Bosnian politics. However, implementation of the agreements is a long story. This is how the country's political system works and more specifically its decision-making system. The problematic institutional framework of the Dayton Accord is the main reason for these long time decisions which affects state's political and economic stability. Local elections are scheduled for November 15th, 2020. Political instability, poor economic performances, entities' rivalries, and problematic framework of state's structure (due to Dayton Accord) have left Bosnia far behind other Western Balkan countries towards the EU. Furthermore, nationalistic rhetoric and actions from the three entities creates certain conditions of mutual mistrust and work as a factor of potential destabilization. Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments. Lately, Turkey seeks to be engaged deeper in Bosnia's Armed Forces training and modernization. Migration issue turns to become a problem of social turbulence for the regions which hosts reception structures for migrants.



BULGARIA: June 26th, Bulgaria's National Assembly passed at first and second reading a revision of the 2020 Budget Act, the second time in three months that this year's Budget had to be updated due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike the first revision in April, which sharply raised the annual borrowing limit and set a Budget deficit target, the second change has been described as technical and updated only the size of maximum

state guarantees on new debt. Revision raised that figure by 310 million leva, or about 158.5 million euro, to 1.81 billion leva. The new state guarantees will allow Bulgaria to participate in two EU schemes meant to decrease the pandemic's economic impact – the temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency and the pan-European guarantee fund. Opposition parties in Parliament backed the Budget revision, which was voted without any debate. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- June 26th, the European Commission confirmed that a new notification on the part of Bulgaria is needed if it wants to resume the construction of Belene nuclear power plant. Motives are the changes to the project, the development of safety standards and the amendment of the legal framework of the Euratom treaty which has changed considerably and has been enhanced since 2007 when the Commission issued a favorable opinion for the construction of the nuclear power plant. EC Spokesperson Tim McPhie stated that if Bulgaria were to decide to resume the Belene project it must guarantee that it is in compliance with the Euratom treaty. (www.novinite.com)

- June 27th, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, the former parliamentary leader of Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borissov's Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Grazhdani za Evropeisko Razvitie Balgariya – GERB) party and who was Interior Minister in the first of Borissov's three Governments, confirmed in a television interview that he intended founding his own political party in September. Tsvetanov resigned from all leadership posts in GERB in May 2019 after an earlier announcement by the anti-corruption commission that he was

being investigated in connection with an alleged cut-price apartment deal. A subsequent investigation cleared him. In September 2019, he founded the Euro-Atlantic Security Center, an NGO working on key issues in the security sector. Earlier in June 2020, Tsvetanov resigned his membership of GERB. Speaking in an interview with bTV, Tsvetanov said that the new party, possible names of which are still being discussed, would participate in Bulgaria's parliamentary elections scheduled to be held in 2021. Tsvetanov said that he had decided to go ahead with founding his own political party after getting huge backing from his supporters for his decision to leave Borissov's party. Tsvetanov said that during his meetings with people from the party who had supported GERB since 2006, he had the impression they no longer trusted the party. "There is inconsistency and chaos in the Government," he said. Legislative changes were being made that were not fit for purpose, such as the idea to set up a state fuel company. Implementing such a project would set Bulgaria back 20 years because of the lack of market principles, he said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bulgaria enjoys political stability. Increased COVID-19 cases are a factor of concern but situation looks like being under control so far. Migration poses a national security threat but currently situation is under control since migrant and refugee flows coming from Turkey are not increased. Nevertheless, situation is closely monitored by Bulgarian authorities. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively. The country pays special attention to energy security developing several

projects. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). However, military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.



CROATIA: June 24th, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic reiterated on Wednesday that postponing the parliamentary election was not an option even if the coronavirus situation deteriorated stressing that Croatia was in a better situation than other countries facing elections. "Our Government defeated COVID-19 in the first wave. If you look at the figures, we are among the top three EU countries with the lowest number of new cases and the lowest number of active cases," Plenkovic said while responding to questions from the press during a visit to the northern city of Cakovec. By way of illustration, he cited France which is holding a second round of local elections while recording over 500 new cases daily. Asked if it was not hypocritical of the Government to call on the public to be responsible while he himself refused to self-isolate after meeting the infected Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic, Plenkovic said he had explained their contact on Tuesday. "If our contact had been such to qualify as close contact, I certainly would have followed the recommendations from epidemiologists rather than those from quack doctors from the opposition who have a political interest to raise such issues. That is a big difference," he said. Plenkovic said that he was willing to do another test if necessary but that he did not see any need for it. He said he believed this would not harm his

Croatian Democratic Union's (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ) party in the forthcoming election because *“people are serious and they see well who is doing what.”* Asked if this situation was damaging to Croatia given that foreign media were also writing about his refusal to self-isolate, the Prime Minister said that it was not because *“this information is not true.”* He referred the press to statements from the Public Health Institute rather than *“copying statements by opposition politicians.”* (www.hr.n1info.com)

- June 27th, the World Bank Board of Directors on Friday approved two projects totaling 500 million US dollars to provide emergency support to the Croatian authorities to cushion the effects of the triple shock that hit the country earlier this year. The unprecedented crisis was caused by the health impacts of COVID-19; the economic crisis caused by the pandemic lockdowns in Croatia and worldwide; and the extensive damage caused by the strongest earthquake in 140 years that hit the Zagreb area on March, 22, the World Bank Office in Croatia said in a press release. The 300 million US dollars Crisis Response and Recovery Development Policy Operation supports the Government's swift and targeted economic packages approved in March and April 2020 to mitigate the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis. It also addresses some of Croatia's longstanding institutional gaps and builds the foundations of an inclusive and sustainable recovery. The first set of measures supported by this operation will mitigate the impact of the pandemic on workers and companies. The 200 million US dollars Earthquake Recovery and Public Health Preparedness Emergency Recovery Project is the first big reconstruction loan for Zagreb following

the devastating March earthquake. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- June 28th, although over 2,000 people in Croatia are self-isolating, the Head of the national civil protection authority said on Saturday that all voters would be enabled to vote in the July 5th, 2020 parliamentary election. *“That is a query we will forward to the State Electoral Commission, which is in constant contact with the Croatian Institute of Public Health, which will provide a framework for how to organize the election and do everything so that it is a controlled situation,”* Interior Minister Davor Bozinovic told Nova TV. Commenting on the coronavirus hotspot in Djakovo, he said epidemiologists had responded promptly and that a certain number of people were in self-isolation, but that there was no need for quarantine. He said the local civil protection authority would consider some restrictions which would not result in cancellations but the postponement of some events. Bozinovic said situation on the border crossings with Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina was being monitored daily and that control had been stepped up until June 30. He said the European Union had recommended that borders with Southeast European countries be reopened as of July 1st, 2020. *“A balanced solution will be sought that is in the interest of protecting the health of all citizens and maintaining economic activity.”* As for the increase in the number of infected young people in night clubs, Bozinovic said inspection teams would continue to visit the clubs, although the goal was not closures and layoffs but health protection. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

The new wave of COVID-19 pandemic raises concerns for the coming elections on July 5th, 2020. The Ministry of Interior is working to secure participation of all voters in the process. The new Government will have hard work to bring the country back to growth. Croatia is close to the Schengen Zone enjoying support in the EU. Croatia – Slovenia border dispute remains active, but COVID-19 pandemic and pre-electoral period in Croatia have downsized current situation. Croatia seeks to maintain its influence in neighboring Bosnia through the Croatian entity in that country. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. However, the current COVID-19 pandemic may affect the ambitious modernization plans due the economic repercussions in the country. Croatian Air Force is far from NATO standards and actually the country lacks an operational air power.



CYPRUS: June 24th, President Nicos Anastasiades on Wednesday appointed lawyer Emily Yiolitis as the new Justice Minister and gave the energy portfolio to current Shipping Deputy Minister Natasa Pilides. The appointments mean there are now three women in the cabinet including Labor Minister Zeta Emilianidou. Aglandjia Mayor Charalambos Petrides was appointed Defense Minister, while shipping expert Vasilis Demetriades took the shipping portfolio. Yiolitis, who served briefly as Head of the board of state electricity company EAC before resigning due to conflict of interest, replaces Giorgos Savvides who was appointed Attorney-General. Pilides is taking the important energy post, replacing Giorgos Lakkotrypīs who

has stepped down after more than seven years in office. Petrides will replace Savvas Angelides who was appointed Deputy Attorney-General. Shipping expert Vasilis Demetrides will be taking the shipping portfolio. The date for new Ministers' confirmation ceremony will be announced later. Unlike them, Savvides and Angelides are scheduled to take over on July 10th, 2020 which could pose a problem as incumbent Costas Clerides said he would retire on August 1st, 2020. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- June 26th, President Nicos Anastasiades said a solution through militarization to Turkey's illegal activities in the region would be the end of Cypriot Hellenism. Cyprus was seeking diplomatic routes to avoid crises, the President said. In statements released ahead of an interview for CyBC on July 1st, 2020 Anastasiades said "If we consider a solution through militarization, this will be the end of Cypriot Hellenism, which I do not want." Commenting on issues in the southeastern Mediterranean and the visit of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell, Anastasiades said Cyprus has been using the "weapons of diplomacy," and the EU official's presence in Cyprus was confirmation of how the European partners were working to avoid a conflict in the area. On the Cyprus problem, he said there needed to be a "restoration of confidence." He said this could happen, if the community with the smaller number did not try to impose itself on the bigger number. He also said Turkey was turning the north into a protectorate, basing its actions on its status as a guarantor power. Ankara's actions have been to the detriment of the Turkish Cypriot community, he added. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- June 28th, the proposal by EU High Representative Josep Borrell to bring together Turkey and the Greek Cypriots is far from serious, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in response to statements by the top EU diplomat who was in Nicosia on an official visit this week. Borrell had called for cooperation between Cyprus and Turkey and welcomed Nicosia's offer to Ankara to negotiate in good faith the maritime delimitation between their relevant coasts. He stressed the importance of the two countries improving their relations and avoid escalating tensions in the region that could be very damaging for everyone. *"The said proposal is far from being serious,"* Spokesman of Turkey's Foreign Ministry, Hami Aksoy, said in response. He added that this proposal was made by the same EU *"which always ignores the existence of the Turkish Cypriots and has never referred to their equal rights over the natural resources of the island in any of its statements."* Aksoy reiterated Turkey's position that the interlocutor of the Turkish Cypriots on hydrocarbon resources is the Greek Cypriots until a comprehensive settlement on the Cyprus problem is reached. *"Therefore, the counterpart of the Foreign Minister of Greek Cypriot Administration is definitely not us, but the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, H.E. Mr Kudret Ozersay,"* he said. If a solution is desired in the eastern Mediterranean, Aksoy said, as a first step, *"The two peoples of the Island should come together and establish a cooperation mechanism for the exploration and exploitation of the hydrocarbon resources, including revenue sharing, as soon as possible."* He said that the proposal by the Turkish Cypriot side submitted in July 2019 provides the necessary ground to this end. The proposal concerns setting up a joint

committee for cooperation on hydrocarbons between the two sides, pointing out that the Greek Cypriot side sees the energy issue a separate one and refuses to talk about this matter with the Turkish Cypriots. Aksoy also said that delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas in the west of Cyprus will only be possible after the settlement of the Cyprus issue. *"Turkey will never sit down with the Greek Cypriot Administration ever which has usurped the title of the Republic of Cyprus and does not represent the Turkish Cypriots,"* he said. Turkey does not recognize Cyprus as a state and has sent warship-escorted vessels to drill for gas in waters where the island nation has exclusive economic rights. Ankara claims nearly half of Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and says it is acting to protect its rights and those of Turkish Cypriots in the island's north. Borrell said this week the EU *"is firmly supportive of the Republic of Cyprus and its sovereignty and sovereign rights."* While on his visit to the island, Borrell on Friday flew over Cyprus' EEZ in a helicopter with Defense Minister Savvas Angelides. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

An almost "shocking" statement by the Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades that militarization of Cyprus is not the solution in current illegal activities of Turkey and it would be the reason of the "end of Cypriot Hellenism" reconsiders the theory of international relations and the concept of states' power! While Turkey continues to question Cyprus' sovereign rights drilling in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) waters and seeking share of the island's hydrocarbons (in the name of the Turkish Cypriots), Cypriot

administration claims in the highest level that military power is not necessary. But in fact this is the main security problem of Cyprus. It cannot stop the Turkish activity so far, failing to protect its sovereign rights since it lacks adequate military means (especially aeronautical forces) to deter Turkey from continuing its activity. Anastasiades statement is considered as a “false assessment” which demonstrates a perception of state’s politics captured by external powers on permanent basis. Diplomacy is a pillar of power but also military is another one. The balanced use of these pillars provides security. It is not expected escalation of situation in the near future since energy companies have postponed their scheduled drills within the Cypriot EEZ. Cypriot energy projects are questioned since the oil and gas companies postponed their activities in the region claiming COVID-19 and low oil prices as the main reasons. In general, Cypriot energy plans have “stuck” and Cypriot gas is far from exploitation yet. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Besides, Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps size) which poses a permanent threat against the Cypriot republic. Lately, the EU expresses increased support in Cyprus frustrating the Turkish side. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: June 23rd, “The presence of Turkish drill ships in Greek waters is a violation of our national sovereignty and we will

not allow it,” Greek Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos said on Monday. The Greek Defense Minister also called Ankara out for claiming to have sought dialogue with Athens and meeting with silence, saying that dialogue is impossible “*when Greece’s sovereign rights are being directly challenged.*” Speaking on Alpha television on Monday night, Panagiotopoulos was responding to comments made over the weekend by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. “*Let them try,*” Cavusoglu said in an interview with Germany’s *Suddeutsche Zeitung* on Sunday when asked what Turkey’s response would be to any efforts by Greece to prevent exploratory drilling for hydrocarbon deposits. “*No one will dare stop our drill ships... if they want an escalation, we will respond.*” The Turkish Foreign Minister also claimed that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had “*wanted*” dialogue with the Greek Government when it was elected last July, but Athens has been “*unwilling*” to engage in talks. For the two sides to sit down together for talks, Panagiotopoulos responded, “*Turkey would have to demonstrate a spirit of good neighborly relations and respect of international law.*” Turkey, he added, “*is behaving like a regional troublemaker, mischief-maker or bully, and this is no way to hold talks.*” (www.ekathimerini.com)

- June 24th, Israel’s Embassy in Greece welcomed on Wednesday a deal signed between Greece-based ONEX Shipyards and Israel Shipyards to build a navy ship for border surveillance in the Mediterranean Sea. “*We believe that this agreement will be a milestone that will be followed by another project. We anticipate its implementation,*” the Embassy said in social media, adding the project will bring the two countries “*closer.*” The Syros island-based

shipyard made the announcement on the development of the “*THEMISTOCLES*” corvette in a press release on Tuesday. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- June 28th, Deputy Finance Minister Theodoros Skylakakis estimated that Greece’s GDP will shrink by 5 – 8% in 2020 and, in any case, shrinkage will be contained below 10%. For 2021, Skylakakis estimated GDP growth similar to that of 2019 (1.87%) or a little higher. The unexpected recession brought on by the coronavirus pandemic, and the resulting drop in state revenue, will delay, but not derail, Government plans for tax and pension contribution cuts. “We will certainly be able to make these cuts in the period 2021 -2023, when we will start getting European (emergency aid). But we will have a problem implementing cuts in 2021,” because of the drop in revenue, Skylakakis told TV station ANT1 Sunday. Speaking on the 2021 budget, Skylakakis said “we will certainly be able to reduce social security contributions, but what else we can do in a difficult and uncertain budget since we cannot yet predict recession with any precision, I cannot say yet,” Skylakakis said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Greece is watching closely Turkish intensions for hydrocarbon drills in Greek Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) and more specifically in the wider area of Kastellorizo island. The Greek Government and military leadership make clear that the country will protect its sovereign rights using all available means implying the use of military force. In the external policy field, Greece intensifies its talks with Egypt seeking to reach an agreement on mutual EEZ. Such an agreement is

of strategic importance since it cancels the Turkish – Libyan agreement on Economic Exclusive Zones (EEZ) which puts Greek vital interests at stake. However, a potential agreement between Greece and Egypt could escalate tension in East Mediterranean dramatically. Of course there is always the possibility of a “hot” incident if Turkey tries to conduct hydrocarbon drills within Greek Exclusive Economic Zone. Under current situation in Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea, Greece is obliged to strengthen and modernize its Armed Forces operational capability. On the illegal migration field, Greece has achieved to shield its land and sea borders. Finally, on political level the Government enjoys public support. Despite, the Prime Minister’s rejection of the possibility of snap elections, this scenario could not be rejected for the coming fall. However, the Prime Minister schedules a short Government’s reshuffle in the near future.



KOSOVO: June 23rd, Richard Grenell, the US President Donald Trump’s special envoy for the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations, said that Washington wanted the forthcoming meeting between Serbia’s and Kosovo’s Presidents at the White House would focus on the economic issues, Nova.rs website reported. In an interview with the Newsmax TV, Grenell said the US got involved in the process “because there is a long history of the so-called experts who were pushing (the talks) into political problems neglecting the economies.” He added young people in Kosovo and Serbia needed jobs and hope. “When I talked about the problems of youths and business communities in both Kosovo and Serbia, it was clear they want economic development, new jobs

and hope,” Grenell said. He added that the economic issues should be focused on to creating a “mini – Shenzhen” zone like the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in China established in 1980. Since then, SEZ has become a leading business, innovation and financial center in China with 40 million employees. In the meantime, Kosovo’s President Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Avdulah Hoti discussed on Tuesday coordination in presenting Pristina’s views in the forthcoming meeting in Washington. *“Thaci and Hoti share a clear vision and full consent regarding the presenting Kosovo at the White House,”* Thaci’s office said in a statement. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 24th, the Special Prosecutors Office for Kosovo based in The Hague wrote the 10-point charges against President Hashim Thaci and Kadri Veseli, former Parliament Speaker, and sent it to the Specialized Chambers of Kosovo for confirmation, N1 reported on Wednesday. The two, and other individuals, are indicted of several crimes against humanity, and war crimes, including the killings, forcible displacement, persecution and torture. They are suspected of criminal responsibility for some 100 murders. *“The victims of the accused include some 100 people whose identity is known and among whom there are Kosovo Albanians, Serbs, Roma and of other nationalities, as well as political foes. The indictment resulted from long-lasting investigations and reflected the Prosecutors’ confidence in the ability to prove all accusations,”* the Prosecutors’ Office said in a statement. The pre-trial Judge of the Specialized Chambers of Kosovo is currently looking into the indictment to rule whether to confirm it. The Prosecutor thought it necessary to publish that the indictment was

written due to Thaci’s and Veseli’s continued attempts to obstruct and undermine the work of the Specialized Chambers, the Wednesday’s statement said. Later on Wednesday, the US President Donald Trump’s special envoy for the negotiations Richard Grenell, who invited Thaci and Serbia’s President Aleksandar Vucic for a meeting at the “White House” on June 27th, 2020 to discuss the resumption of the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations, wrote in social media Thaci informed him he would not come. The Prosecutor’s statement added that Thaci and Veseli, conducted a secret campaign to annul the law based on which the Specialized Chambers were formed as a Court, and obstructed the Court’s work in other ways. *“With such acts, Thaci and Veseli showed they saw their interests as more important than the victims of their crimes, the rule of law and Kosovo’s entire population,”* the statement said. Thaci cut short his trip to Washington for the June 27th meeting and is coming back to Kosovo on Thursday. He decided not to go to the US after learning about the indictment, his office said in a statement. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 26th, in meetings with the European President Ursula von der Leyden and the EU Enlargement Commissioner Oliver Verhaly, Kosovo's Prime Minister Avdulah Hoti said Pristina was *“decisively committed to pro-western orientation,”* and that EU should enable its citizen's free movement, N1 reported on Friday. The meetings’ agenda included visa liberalization, situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic, Kosovo's Government measures for the economic recovery after it, the latest political events and the new European reform. *“visa liberalization remains the most urgent issue that has to be*

solved with the EU. Without it, the credibility of all processes involving the EU is jeopardized. Kosovo's Government and its civil society did a great job, and we hope that the EU will appreciate those achievements,” Hoti said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Developments in Kosovo are rapid and restart of talks between Belgrade and Pristina are in question after indictment of Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci and former Parliament Speaker, Kadri Veseli for war crimes by the Special Prosecutors Office for Kosovo. It was a surprise move by the prosecution which undermined dialogue before even start. Of course the timing of the indictment (just before the start of Kosovo – Serbia talks) is a question. It is assessed that the timing is related with the US politics and the Trump administration; Talks between the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and his Kosovo counterpart, Thaci including a potential agreement would be a major success of American diplomacy and some “US political circles” would not see that option positively. Under these circumstances Thaci is out of talks and the Prime Minister, Avdullah Hoti will lead the Kosovo negotiation team. Fight against corruption, organized crime, money laundering and trafficking, establishment of rule of law, accountable and transparent state institutions, and functional public administration are the main challenges for Kosovo towards its European path.



MOLDOVA: June 23rd, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), at a today's meeting, made public the list of parties and other social and political organizations, registered by

the Public Services Agency, which have right to participate in the new local polls due on September 6th, 2020, for the position of Mayor of the Tarnova village, northern Donduseni district and Nucareni village, central Telenesti village. Under the article 46, paragraph 2, letter a) of the Electoral Code, only the political formations registered by the Public Services Agency till the establishing of the elections date have right to nominate candidates for a ballot. Thus, CEC presented a list of 47 political formations which can put forward their candidates for the office of Mayor in the aforementioned two settlements from the Donduseni and Telenesti districts. (www.moldpres.md)

- June 25th, after a short exchange of opinions with President of Russia Vladimir Putin on the dynamic of the Moldovan - Russian bilateral relations, President Igor Dodon continued discussing more in detail current problems with the Deputy Head of the presidential administration, Special Representatives of the Russian President for the development of the commercial and economic ties with Moldova Dmitry Kozak, the presidential press service has reported. After dialogue on the most important subjects on bilateral agenda, officials reached the following agreements: 1. Moldova and Russia will resume negotiations on the providing of the loan worth 200 million euro for backing the Moldovan economy. On the next days, the Governments of the two countries will agree on procedures due to be undertaken to this end. 2. At a request by the Moldovan President, Russia accepted to extend the facilities for the free tax deliveries of Moldovan goods. This means that, starting from July 1st, 2020, the fruits, vegetables, canned goods and wine products from Moldova

will be supplied to the Russian market without customs duties, which will allow Moldovan producers saving at least 20 - 25 million lei per year. 3. The sides agreed on solving the problem of issuance of authorizations (permits) for the transit of goods from Moldova to Russia, through Ukraine. 4. At a request by the President of Moldova, Russia will analyze the possibility to provide humanitarian assistance in diesel fuel for the agricultural enterprises hit by the unprecedented drought from this year. Also, the head of state discussed with the Russian side more issues dealing with the confidence-building measures, as well as other aspects on the advancement of the Transnistrian conflict settlement. (www.moldpres.md)

- June 26th, the US State Department Report on Trafficking in People for 2020 was published on June 25th, 2020. It reflects the states' efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking in 2019, the Government's communication and protocol department has reported. According to the Report, the Government has shown a growing effort in this area compared to the previous period. Thus, Moldova remained at the Tier 2* level in the ranking established by the US Department of State. The report includes a number of recommendations for state authorities in the fight against trafficking in human beings, in particular the implementation of measures to combat corruption in the judiciary, the protection of investigating officers and prosecutors from external influence and internal corruption; proactive identification of victims of trafficking in human beings, including undocumented migrants, and referral to assistance services; strengthening the capacity of law enforcement agencies for a victim-centered approach in criminal

investigations and prosecutions, increasing access to placement and rehabilitation services for victims of child trafficking; rethinking the mechanism for carrying out on-the-job inspections, especially unannounced ones. (www.moldpres.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Moldova enjoys fragile political stability. Presidential elections announced for November 1st, 2020. The President, Igor Dodon is the absolute dominant of state's politics and any further political development should have his approval. Moldova has become a field of the ongoing rivalry between the West (namely the EU and NATO) and Russia for influence. The country is considered by the US and EU of great strategic importance being in the soft underbelly of Russia. On the other hand, Moldova is considered by Russia as an important region for its national security belonging by principle to its sphere of influence. Russia maintains troops in Transnistria which are considered by pro-western forces as violating Moldovan sovereignty. The frozen conflict of Transnistria is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization. Corruption, lack of transparency and accountability reign in public administration and state's politics.



MONTENEGRO: June 23rd, as the European Commission decided to approve the opening of the last negotiating chapter with Montenegro, Prime Minister, Dusko Markovic, noted that this day is a great day for Montenegro, which has confirmed that it is the most promising and closest to EU membership. "We are very pleased to receive the news that the competent

EC's body has given the green light to open the last chapter 8 – Competition – in negotiations with the EU. We expect this to be formally confirmed tomorrow. This is a great day for Montenegro, which will thus become the first candidate country to open all negotiation chapters,” the Prime Minister said. It is also a great recognition to the Government and all the bodies for their hard work on the adoption and application of European standards and harmonization with European regulations. *“At the same time, it is a response to all those who tried to question the democratic and reform capacities of Montenegro.”* He recalled that our country has come a long and difficult way since the beginning of negotiations, having in mind the fact that a new approach focused on progress in Chapters 23 and 24 was applied to us for the first time, as well as certain challenges that followed the internal consolidation in the EU. (www.cdm.me)

- June 24th, yesterday, the Parliament adopted budget revision and decision on borrowing. President of the Parliament, Ivan Brajovic, asked the MPs to vote due to the urgency of Government's negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Minister of Finance, Darko Radunovic, pointed out that reasons for revision could be found in the creation of necessary legal conditions for additional borrowing. According to him, 877.5 million euro will be missing this year, the fact which prompted the Government to negotiate with partner and financial institutions. *“We expect to provide around 500 million euro to cover the missing funds in the current year,”* Radunovic said. Vice-president of the Parliament, Genci Nimanbegu, said that the country should count on the support from the EU and international community. *“This*

is the most reasonable borrowing, the salvation for our citizens,” Nimanbegu pointed out. His counterpart, Ervin Ibrahimovic, said that the third package of assistance for the economy should be adopted as soon as possible. Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) member, Žana Filipovic, pointed out that the focus of the third package would be on helping local self-governments, providing subsidies to the salaries of micro, small and medium enterprises as well as assisting banking sector and creating conditions for financing economy and development projects. Member of Social Democrats (Socijaldemokrate - SD), Boris Mugosa, said that the key component of the third package should be strengthening the real estate sector, domestic production and reduction of import. Revision of the budget envisages a 40% decline in tourism. *“The 40% decline seems to be too optimistic at the moment, but projections were made by the most renowned people from IMF and WB,”* Radunovic said. Democratic Front (Demokratski Front – DF) member, Milutin Djukanovic, believes that fall in revenues in tourism will be higher than 70%. Nedjeljko Rudovic, from Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (Socijalistička Narodna Partija Crne Gore - SNP) – Democratic Alliance (Demokratski Savez - DEMOS), claims that the decline in the most important branch of our economy will exceed 40%. DPS member, Filip Vukovic, said that IMF and WB were not commercial but political banks and that they *“cannot be very incorrect in their assessments.”* President of the Committee on Economy and DPS member, Predrag Sekulic, said that every crisis was a development chance. *“We have focused more on agriculture as development resource. Right now, share of agriculture in total GDP is*

10%,” Sekulic said. Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska Partija Crne Gore - SDP) member, Rasko Konjevic, said that deep crisis was ahead of us. DF member, Branka Bosnjak, also thinks that revision of the budget is just a pre-election projection and that source revenues cannot cover all the running costs and transfers. Member of the SNP, Srdan Milic, said that he “does not predict a cent over the collection of tax receivables.” (www.cdm.me)

- June 25th, the Montenegrin Police said on Thursday they arrested 41 people for “*provoking incidents in several towns*,” and filed criminal charges against 54 people, the FoNet news agency reported. The Police statement said people gathered in seven cities and towns without permission and provoked incidents. The latest arrests and criminal charges came after days of clashes between the opposition and ruling officials and supporters in the opposition-held coastal town of Budva. They also followed months of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) organized protests against Montenegro’s Law on Religious Freedom which SPC and people from the tiny Adriatic republic who considered themselves of a Serb origin saw as the state attempt to confiscate their Church properties. In the meantime, the President, Milo Djukanovic accused SPC of wanting to rule Montenegro and push the country back into a theocratic state from the Middle Age. Earlier on Thursday, Budva Town’s Hall was closed to everyone except for special investigators who were collecting documents following the incidents and unrest during the taking-over of local power. In Wednesday’s clashes, 17 people were detained, and a Police Officer was injured. The Police used teargas to disperse protesters. New Budva local

leadership led by the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) ousted the opposition authorities’ leaders on June 11th, 2020 after one of an opposition Councilor switched sides and joined DPS. The Democratic Montenegro (Demokratska Crna Gora - DCG) and Democratic Front (Demokratski Front – DF) Councilors, who make up the opposition coalition, claim that was a case of corruption. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Montenegro maintains its internal turmoil amid protests, violence and political abnormality. Despite positive signals for the country’s European perspective, the country lacks political calmness and suffers from long corruption, organized crime, poor public administration transparency and accountability, and problematic justice function. Despite all problems, Djukanovic rule achieved to bring the country into the NATO Alliance and very close to the EU membership. Elections of August 30th, 2020 will be a strong democratic “stress test” and it is assessed that the country needs fair and free elections to re-establish political stability. Tension with Serbia remains in high level. Actually it has been transformed into a field of the long rivalry between the US – NATO and Russia. It should be noted that the country has a significant number of Serbs, while there is notable sympathy among Montenegrin people for Serbs. Montenegro needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive

investment environment. The country focuses on strengthening its Armed Forces by purchasing modern equipment.



NORTH MACEDONIA: June 22nd, the 8-day state of emergency declared by President Stevo Pendarovski to ensure continual preparations for the July 15th, 2020 elections expires on Monday. The last, fifth in a row, state of emergency was declared on June 15th, 2020 after leader of the ruling Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) Zoran Zaev and leader of the opposition Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство – VMRO-DPMNE) Hristijan Mickoski reached an agreement to hold the early parliamentary elections on July 15th, 2020. President Pendarovski said the decision to declare a state of emergency was made towards ensuring continual preparations for the elections, especially the enforcement of measures for protection of public health during the electoral process, in time of a COVID-19 pandemic. The 8-day state of emergency was to be used solely for the required election-related decisions and protocols, with a focus on the measures protecting public health. The early parliamentary election was initially to be held on April 12th, 2020 but due to the coronavirus crisis and the first state of emergency declared in March, election-related activities were suspended by a Government decree. Following several weeks of failed talks, consultations, as well as leaders' meetings hosted by the President, the ruling party and the

opposition finally reached an agreement for the election to be held on July 15th, 2020. According to the State Election Commission (SEC), 15 coalitions and parties with 1,598 candidates will take part in the election. The election campaign will be launched on Wednesday – June 24th, 2020. Heads of the MP candidates signed the Code for fair and democratic election and stressed their commitment to abide by COVID-19 protective measures to ensure public health safety. In line with SEC revised timetable, election silence begins at midnight on July 12th, 2020 and the election campaign ends. According to the timetable, COVID-19 patients, people in isolation and self-isolation will vote on July 13th, 2020 while the homebound, infirm and aged on July 14th, 2020. July 15th, 2020 is Election Day, starting at 7 am and ending at 9 pm. (www.republika.mk)

- June 22nd, OSCE/ODIHR observers started Monday their work and met with members of the State Election Commission, at which they were briefed on the course of the electoral process. Upon the Government's invitation, OSCE/ODIHR has sent a Special Election Assessment Mission (SEAM) for the July 15th, 2020 early parliamentary elections. The SEAM is made up of a team of seven experts, who will be based in Skopje and follow all aspects of the electoral process from there. The team includes a head of mission, deputy head of mission, political analyst, election analyst, voter registration analyst, legal analyst and media analyst. ODIHR Spokesperson Katya Andrusz told MIA last week that the mission will carefully assess how far the election is held in line with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections, as well as with national legislation. "We

were forced to suspend our election observation mission to the early parliamentary elections in North Macedonia due to the travel restrictions and health concerns that followed the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The health of our colleagues is always a priority. The safety considerations as well as continuing restrictions on international travel and limitations on entry to the countries holding elections are creating challenges for all our election-related activities and particularly for the deployment of long- and short-term observers, who are sent directly by OSCE countries,” noted Andrusz. As always in the countries in which ODIHR observes, we will cooperate with the authorities throughout the election process, Andrusz added. (www.republika.mk)

- June 25th, the European Commission (EC) is still “finalizing” the negotiating frameworks for North Macedonia and Albania. European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi stated several times that the negotiating frameworks will be presented in June, MIA’s Brussels correspondent reported on Thursday. EC Spokesperson Ana Pisonero told today’s press briefing that “*the European Commission is still working on the texts of the drafts of the negotiating frameworks.*” “*We are currently finalizing the documents. I cannot give you a date when they will be presented. It is clear that our aim is to be able to do it as soon as possible,*” Pisonero said. Negotiating frameworks have been announced by the European Commission since the beginning of June. The EC informed that the negotiating frameworks will not be available to the public, only a statement will be issued. These draft texts will need to be presented to the Council of the EU and later on to adopt

them. According to the Council’s agenda, they are not expected to be on the agenda this summer, as the EU budget is to be intensively discussed in the coming weeks. (www.republika.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Pre-electoral campaign has started in North Macedonia without tension and incidents. OSCE monitors arrived in Skopje aiming to observe the whole process. Elections will be held on July 15th, 2020. Although the country has a caretaker Government situation is not stable since the Parliament has been dissolved and there is no elected Government to handle major state’s issues. It is estimated that elections could take place on July but parties are still on consultations. The country should focus on reforms regarding justice, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, public administration, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process.



ROMANIA: June 23rd, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE) Chairman Calin Popescu-Tariceanu believes that the European Parliament (EP), the European Commission (EC) and the Venice Commission need to be notified about the “repeated attacks” to the fundamental institutions of justice and parliamentary democracy, like, among others, the Ombudsman and the Constitutional Court of Romania. “*Democracy only with approval from the Victoria Palace [Government Palace – editor’s note]! Because the Ombudsman refuses to become the Orban Government’s lawyer, she is asked to resign! Because the Judges of the Constitutional Court*

refused to become Mr Prime Minister Orban's servants, they are attacked with bayonets! In general, everything that is not to Ludovic Orban's liking must be dismissed and changed! This disease of power that Ludovic Orban became infected with is very dangerous! It is dangerous because it hurts the fundamental principles of democracy, in institutions that, like it or not, serve the public interest and not a party one!," Tariceanu wrote on social media. According to Tariceanu, *"repeated attacks on justice, Parliament, the rights and freedoms of the citizen constitute serious threats to democracy and the rule of law."* *"You know I am not a fan of complaints to the High Court, because I think we have done too much harm by washing our clothes in public, but this offensive to democracy must be signaled to all who have eyes to see and ears to hear. I believe that the European Parliament and the European Commission, as well as the Venice Commission, must be notified, and repeated attacks on the judiciary, the fundamental institutions of justice and parliamentary democracy must be sanctioned in any way possible. It is clear that the masters of these people from PNL (National Liberal Party) are not from this country but from outside of it!"* said Tariceanu. The Liberals submitted, on Monday, to Parliament, the request for the removal from Ombudsman office of Renate Weber. *"We have initiated the procedure today to remove the Ombudsman, Mrs Renate Weber. The first step of this procedure is to submit the removal request signed by the leader of the PNL group in the Senate and the undersigned, in my capacity as leader of the Liberals in the Deputies Chamber. The removal request has been submitted today with the Standing Bureau, and it has two counts, in principle. The first one refers to the conflict of*

interests Mrs Renate Weber is facing right now, as she is supposed to serve the state and the people while she acts against the state and the people. Basically, when she attacked the Constitutional Court of Romania, Mrs Renate Weber was basically protecting her own special pension as Ombudsman, and the second count refers to the fact that she exceeded her attributions by establishing that torture mechanism against the COVID hospitals, and we detailed on the two aspects. The request has a clear legal nature as well," Florin Roman stated, before the meeting of the Executive Bureau of the PNL, which takes place at the headquarters of the party. He showed that the discussions with the MPs to back this action have already started. Liberals claim Weber violated article 72 of the Constitution, regarding the conflict of interests. *"We ask you to notify the legal committees of the Deputies' Chamber and the Senate to hear Mrs Renate Weber, the Ombudsman, and to make a report by which to propose the joint sitting of the Deputies' Chamber and the Senate her removal from the said public office,"* show the Liberals. (www.nineoclock.ro)

- June 25th, the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) has ruled on Thursday that there is no need for the Parliament's green light to enforce or extend the state of alert. On the other hand, the constitutional Judges established that isolation or quarantine measures cannot be taken by Minister's order. The Ombudsman has referred the articles in the law on the state of alert to the Constitutional Court in early June, arguing that the fines and offenses imposed for breaking the law are not legal. The Ombudsman has also challenged the article through the Parliament is giving its go-ahead for the state of alert imposed

through Government resolution. Ombudsman Renate Weber claims that, by the Parliament's approving a Government resolution, the principle of separation of powers is violated. She also considers that *"by introducing a new form of parliamentary control over the Government's actions,"* the Parliament *"has converted the traditional legal nature of administrative legislative act of the Government resolution into a political document"* that is exclusively targeting the constitutional relation between Parliament and Government." Few days ago, the Liberal Party filed a request to dismiss Ombudsman Renate Weber, accusing her of exceeding her legal powers. (www.nineoclock.ro)

- June 26th, on Thursday, the Government approved a bill setting the date of the local elections on September 27th, 2020. *"The bill establishing the date of the 2020 elections to the local public administrations, namely September 27th, 2020 has been adopted,"* Ionel Danca, Head of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, said Thursday after a meeting of the Government. Prime Minister Ludovic Orban said last Saturday in Suceava that at this week's meeting, the Government will adopt a bill proposing that the local elections be held on September 27th, 2020. *"Our proposal for the election date will be September 27th. After the promulgation of the law for the extension of the terms in office [of local elected officials] adopted by Parliament, at next week's government meeting, we will adopt the bill proposing September 27th as the elections date, and, obviously, a series of other measures, some of which are also related to the protection of the people involved in the electoral process,"* said Orban, according to Agerpres. He voiced his conviction that by September 27th, 2020 the

spread of the new coronavirus would diminish and local elections could be held. *"Our goal is to reduce the spread. (...) At the current level of spread, certainly yes [the elections will be held on the set date]. But I am convinced that by September 27th things will improve significantly,"* he said. The Permanent Electoral Authority has drafted the bill setting the date for the 2020 local elections, as well as measures for their proper organization and conduct that says local elections will be held on September 27th, 2020. Orban said on Thursday evening that there will be an election campaign for local elections without public gatherings, without electoral rallies, in compliance with COVID-19 protection measures. *"Today, we have adopted a bill at the Government meeting proposing September 27th as the election date (...). It is true that it will not be possible to organize public meetings, election rallies; if canvassing is done door to door, the candidates will have to wear a mask; for the wearing of a mask in enclosed spaces a more intense media campaign will be conducted online, because now, the internet is clearly a safe means of communication. Candidates and voters must also adapt,"* Orban told Digi24 private broadcaster. Orban added that the observance of the COVID-19 protection measures will be taken into account for the organization of the polling stations. *"When organizing the polling stations you obviously have to take some measures related to the maximum number of people to enter, queues at a certain distance, disinfectants, protective masks, all the rules must be followed,"* he said. The Prime Minister also said that the general election could take place on December 6th, 2020. *"In our opinion, December 6th is due time for the general election, its constitutional term. It is the date we have suggested. I am waiting for the views of*

other political parties on the date,” Orban said. (www.nineoclock.ro)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political disputes continue in Romania but situation is rather stable. Local elections announced for September 27th, 2020, while the Government announced that December 6th, 2020 could be a convenient date for general elections. Opposition claims that the Government violates democratic rules of the country seeking to address European institutions for current situation. Romania enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: June 22nd, the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka - SNS) is likely to have 189 Deputies in the 250-seat country's Parliament, after winning over 63% of votes, and will be joined by two other parties and those of the minorities, N1 reported. Besides SNS, its current key coalition partner, the Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička Partija Srbije - SPS), and the first-time runner in the general election, the Serbian Patriotic Alliance (Srpski Patriotski Savez – SPAS) passed the 3% threshold, reduced from 5% amid the opposition boycott campaign. Several minority parties will also have Deputies based on the natural threshold. The official results will be published by Wednesday. Still, the SNS leader and country's President Aleksandar Vucic declared a landslide victory in the Sunday's parliamentary, provincial and local elections tarnished by a boycott from the leading opposition

group Alliance for Serbia (Savez za Srbiju - SzS), who accused the leader of burgeoning authoritarianism. Vucic did not run for office himself but solely led the SNS campaign under “Aleksandar Vucic – for Our Children” slogan. The campaign had two parts – before the state emergency due to the coronavirus epidemic and after it was lifted. “I am grateful to the people for this historical support,” Vucic, the 50-year-old who had been in power since 2012, said at the SNS headquarters during the celebration with blasted brass music. “We won everywhere,” Vucic said. “We won in the places where we had never won before,” he added. Coupled with the opposition stay-at-home campaign and lingering concerns about the coronavirus, turnout was lower than usual—but not dramatically—at slightly under 50% according to the independent election monitor CRTA. The boycotting opposition slammed the “fake elections” and claimed their movement was victorious. However, SNS won a majority in the local assembly in the central Paracin municipality so far being one of a few districts held by the opposition. The results for Sabac in western Serbia, the only town where SNS lost elections four years ago, are still being counted, but Vucic's party declared victory. It failed to take over the municipality of Serbia's western municipality of Cajetina, where the opposition coalition won 61% of those who voted at local elections. According to the preliminary results, 18 parties, including the ultra-nationalist Serbian Radical Party (Srpska Radikalna Stranka - SRS), led by convicted war criminal Vojislav Seselj, considered Vucic's political father, did not cross the 3% threshold for the national Parliament. Balkans analyst Florian Bieber wrote on social media that on without a meaningful opposition, the “pyrrhic victory” could ultimately

discredit SNS as it would be viewed as “*less legitimate than ever before.*” He said that SNS exceeded results of the Russian President Vladimir Putin’s United Russia party. Parliamentary seats according to CeSID: ruling coalition 221, opposition (kinda) 12, minorities 17 MPs. Serbia’s watchdogs say Vucic’s power lies in his manipulation of the media, with the majority of outlets, including TV channels with national frequency and tabloids, effectively serving as SNS mouthpiece. However, besides close ties with Moscow and Beijing, Vucic has backing from the West, seen as capable of resolving Serbia’s decades-long territorial dispute with the former province of Kosovo which declared independence from Serbia in 2008. After cementing his power in Sunday’s elections, Vucic will face pressure to make progress on talks with Pristina on the normalization of relations that have been on hold since November 2018. His already busy schedule includes talks with the EU’s envoy for Serbia and Kosovo Miroslav Lajcak on Monday, visit Moscow and meet Kosovo representatives at the White House on June 27th, 2020. Vucic has never disclosed his plan for Kosovo solution since it is a sensitive issue for the Serbs but vowed Belgrade would never accept to recognize Pristina’s independence despite great pressure from the leading players in the international community. He reiterated that “*Serbia cannot lose everything, while Kosovo wins everything.*” However, many see his latest statement – ‘the EU membership is not enough for Serbia’s support of Kosovo’s UN seat as preparation of the public at home for at least agreeing to that without official recognition and any diplomatic ties with Kosovo. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 26th, Aleksandar Vucic, Serbia’s President, told reporters in Brussels he believed Belgrade would close all negotiating chapters in the accession talks with the EU by 2024, and that the country might become a bloc’s full member two years later, N1 Reported. After an hour-long meeting with the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Vucic said that before the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations could resume, the Western Balkans leader should meet the EU officials in Paris. That event has been announced, but no details have been revealed. Vucic said talks with Von der Leyen included Serbia’s Euro-integration, dialogue with Pristina and a package of economic aid. Later on Friday, sources in Brussels confirmed to N1 that Chapter 2 on “*Free movement of workers*” within the accession talks between the EU and Serbia would not be opened as expected. Vucic also met with the EU Enlargement Commissioner Oliver Varhelyi, the EU Special Envoy for the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue Miroslav Lajcak and would have talks with the Charles Michel, the President of the European Council. Vucic did not want to explicitly comment on the situation following the Specialised Prosecutor for Kosovo announced indictments against Pristina’s officials, including his Kosovo counterpart Hashim Thaci, who was his main partner in negotiating the normalization of Belgrade - Pristina relations for years. However, he later said the indictments were a problem for the Serbs in Kosovo. “*This is a certain security risk for all Serbs in Kosovo and does not exclude problems in Serbia’s two southern districts (with an ethnic Albanian majority),*” he claimed. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 27th, the Kosovo talks should resume despite the war crime indictment against Kosovo President Hashim Thaci, President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic told Brussels-based media. Speaking to Politico news website, Vucic said he was willing to meet Thaci if Kosovo leaders decided he would be part of the Kosovo delegation in future talks. However, Vucic said he doubted this would happen. Serbian President rejected to comment on the indictment during the Brussels meetings with the EU officials but that he wished the EU-mediated talks would continue. *“We do not want to ignite further political or physical clashes between Serbs and Albanians and also it is the best way to protect the safety and security of the Serbs living in Kosovo,”* he told the website. *“We need to resume our dialogue process with whomever the Albanian side will pick as their representative”* he said, adding that dialogue has to resume, otherwise *“what would be the region perspective.”* Asked if he would meet Thaci if he was involved in talks, Vucic replied that he could always say he would not speak to someone indicted of war crimes but that it is up to Albanian people to choose their leadership. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

SNS achieved a convinced victory on the elections of June 21st, 2020, despite opposition's boycott. Turnout was a little less than 50% which is slightly less of the respective four years ago. Turnout which was not dramatically low could be assessed as a failure of opposition. On the other hand, the absence of a strong opposition in the Parliament raises concerns over the parliamentary process, democratic control of the Government and transparency of Parliament's

activity. In other words, political stability and strengthen of democratic rule did not achieve in these elections. These situation of democratic deficit may affect Serbia's European integration, despite the President, Aleksandar Vucic's optimism that Serbia could join the EU by 2026. No new chapters will open in the near future for Serbia which indicates a stagnation of the process. Besides, Serbia has to normalize its relations with Kosovo before joining the EU. Vucic declared publically that he seeks resumption of talks between Belgrade and Pristina, but the latest indictments of Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci and former Parliament Speaker, Kadri Veseli blocked the whole process. Vucic avoided commenting the indictment of Thaci which is assessed as an effort to facilitate the dialogue process. Besides, Thaci and Vucic are considered by the EU and US administration as the ideal interlocutors for a successful outcome of negotiations namely normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. It is assessed that Vucic's internal political stability (despite accusations regarding media freedom, authoritarian practices, justice control etc) is based on his cooperation with the EU and US in reaching an agreement with Pristina. The EU has raised serious concerns over Serbia's effectiveness on independence and accountability of the judiciary, freedom of expression, prevention of corruption and the fight against organized crime. 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: June 22nd, Chief of the General Staff, Brigadier-General Robert Glavas does not think situation at the moment grants invoking a special article of the defense act that would give the Army Police powers. Appearing in a talk show on TV Slovenija on Sunday, Glavas said the Army had sufficient powers to help Police on the border under existing legislation. This was in response to Police Commissioner Anton Travner saying he saw no reason why the military would not operate in the country's interior, not just along the border. (www.sta.si)

- June 22nd, the Defense Ministry presented a bill under which investments worth 780 million euro are to be made in the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) in 2021-2026. The majority of the funds, or 408 million euro, is to go for eight- and four-wheeled armored personnel carriers for a battalion. Defense Minister, Matej Tonin told the newspaper Delo that if he was allowed to stay on as Defense Minister, Slovenia would be able to set up a battalion which would meet NATO standards by 2026. The core of the first battalion will be a medium-sized mechanized battalion, which the Government would like to fully equip while this piece of legislation is in place. (www.sta.si)

- June 25th, President Borut Pahor expressed concern in an interview Wednesday about the low level of trust in political institutions, saying things could get to a point "where somebody would understand this as a call for autocracy." "This simply must not happen," he told Radio Ognjisce. Pahor also commented on the anti-Government protests. He said it is not possible to expect political correctness at protests, while the key thing is that there is no physical and verbal

violence and that death threats are avoided. In what is a likely reference to the "death to Jansism" slogan, which is perceived by Prime Minister Janez Jansa as a direct death threat, Pahor stressed he meant threats that targeted physical people, not calls addressing phenomena. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Janez Jansa's Government enjoys relative stability. Slovenia – Croatia dispute regarding the Piran Bay is still active but without tension or escalation due to COVID-19 pandemic. 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. Political decision to finance Armed Forces with 780 million euro from 2012 to 2026 for strengthening their defense capabilities is moving ahead.



TURKEY: June 23rd, France's attitude ignoring Turkey's legitimate rights in the Eastern Mediterranean and supporting maximalist ambitions hampers peace and stability while raising tensions in the region, the Turkish Foreign Ministry stated Tuesday. The Ministry further urged French President Emmanuel Macron in a written statement to end steps risking the security and future of Libya, Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean, and instead to use established dialogue channels. "France, which has no coast in the Eastern Mediterranean, has to understand that acting like a coastal country does not give it

the right to decide on regional issues. Unfortunately, it has been obvious for a long time that France cannot and does not want to evaluate the developments in the Eastern Mediterranean healthily and objectively,” it said. “French President Emmanuel Macron calling Turkey’s support for the legitimate Government in Libya a ‘dangerous game’ can only be explained with the abdication of reason,” the statement of the Ministry added. It highlighted that France has significant responsibility for Libya’s drift into chaos, playing the actual “dangerous game” in Libya while it said that Paris’ silence in the face of General Khalifa Haftar backer Egypt’s threat to intervene in Libya is also a fact to be noted. Commenting on Macron’s statements regarding Turkey and Libya, Spokesman of Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) Omer Celik criticized the French leader’s stance and said “France is in a position of a supporter of policies promoting instability in Libya and the Mediterranean.” “The Libyan people will decide on Libya’s future, not France,” Celik added, “Macron’s politics is a backing of putschists who try to steal the legitimate will and future of the Libyan people. It can be clearly seen that those making alleged statements against our President and those that are disturbed by Turkey’s support for Libya are after a new colonialism.” The Turkish Foreign Ministry’s statement comes after Macron on Monday accused NATO member Turkey of playing a “dangerous game” with regard to Libya which could threaten the whole region. Tensions have risen over the last year between Paris and Ankara, notably when the French leader said the lack of NATO response to a Turkish anti-terror operation in northern Syria showed the alliance was undergoing “brain death.” The Ankara -

Paris strains soared further last week when France denounced an “*extremely aggressive*” intervention by Turkish ships against a French Navy vessel participating in a NATO mission in the Mediterranean, a claim Ankara dismissed as “*groundless*.” Macron described this as proof of his concern for NATO. (www.dailysabah.com)

- June 23rd, the appeals Court approved on Tuesday nine years and eight months of jail time for main opposition Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP) Istanbul head Canan Kaftancıoğlu. Kaftancıoğlu was sentenced on charges of making propaganda for an armed terrorist organization; defamation of a public servant, the President, and the Turkish state and inciting public hatred and violence. She denied all accusations, saying that she had not intended to insult the President or the Turkish state. The Prosecutors originally sought up to 17 years for Kaftancıoğlu. Eight people, including President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, acted as complainants. The inquiry was started due to comments Kaftancıoğlu posted on social media between 2012 and 2017, as well as complaints, which were also stated in the accusation. Her posts concerning Sakine Cansız, a PKK founder who died in France and was responsible for the recruitment of women for the group, were categorized as terrorist propaganda. She was convicted of the crime of provoking hatred and hostility among people for her comments regarding the Gulenist Group’s (FETO) July 15th, 2016, coup attempt. The CHP’s Istanbul head has been a highly controversial figure in Turkish society over questionable comments and actions. She previously expressed support for the PKK leader, who was assassinated in Paris in a likely internal feud in 2013. Two days after the murder,

Kaftancıoğlu wrote on social media that “humanity is lost,” citing one of the Cansız’s statements on women. She has even seen serious backlash from the CHP’s own voter base but kept her seat despite serious challenges. During the campaign period for the March 31st elections, she announced that she would be resigning from her post in reaction to the choice of mayoral candidates; however, she later withdrew her resignation. The CHP was criticized for its unofficial alliance with the pro-PKK Peoples’ Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi - HDP) in the local elections. (www.dailysabah.com)

- June 26th, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Greece’s Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis held a phone call on Friday to discuss bilateral relations as well as cooperation on tourism, security, the economy and the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, a statement by the Turkish Presidency said. Talks focused on the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and issues relating to the reopening of borders and tourist visits following the end of lockdowns, Mitsotakis’ office said. The statement of the Turkish Presidency said that the two leaders agreed to keep communication channels between the two countries open. Greece and Turkey are at odds over various decades-old issues ranging from mineral rights in the East Mediterranean, to the ethnically split Cyprus. Turkey’s Ambassador to Athens Burak Ozugergin said this week that Ankara is open to discussing its differences with Greece, and the two neighboring countries can resolve issues such as rights over natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and the split of the island of Cyprus within the context of the United Nations charter. Mitsotakis also earlier

this month expressed his readiness to discuss the delimitation of maritime zones with Turkey. “Greece is always open to a dialogue with Turkey to delimitate the maritime zones,” Mitsotakis told an economic forum in the capital Athens. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Turkish intervention in Libya has become an issue of a wider struggle for power in the region. France, Russia, UAE, Egypt, Greece on the one hand (supporting General Haftar’s forces) and Turkey, US, Qatar, Italy (and the EU) on the other supporting the UN-recognized Government of Fayed al-Sarraj. Things are getting more and more complicated since Egypt threatens with military intervention in Libyan territory; a situation which could put the whole region on fire. Turkey has invested its strategic interests through its alliance with Sarraj and supports him by military assets. A potential victory of Sarraj secures Turkish interests and strong presence of Turkey in Eastern Mediterranean. At the moment it seems that UAE is the main rival of Turkey in the struggle for power in the Middle East and East Mediterranean. However, France has taken a leading role against Turkey in Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa taking in advantage the absence (?) of the US and lack of capability of German Armed Forces (Navy mostly). The strategic cooperation of Greece, Cyprus and Israel or Greece, Cyprus, Egypt makes Turkey nervous. Moreover, delimitation of maritime zones between Greece and Italy in Ionian Sea frustrated Turkey. A potential agreement between Greece and Egypt on EEZ could become a source of turbulence in the region since Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in the east Mediterranean Sea. It is expected to react


violently if balance of power is jeopardized. The country continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens 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. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will set the base to become a regional military super power. Without any question, Turkey has the characteristics of a regional superpower and it tries to act like one. However, the most important for taking this role in the region is to stabilize its economy and secondly to improve its military capabilities.


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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.*