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SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: May 8th, the Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, declared from a joint press release with the EU High Representative, Federica Mogherini, that Albania expects the European Commission to recommend the EU accession negotiations. *“Albania speaks with results. We are aware that the final decision will depend on the specific circumstances of member countries, but we believe that it is time to close the phase for preparing the negotiations, and open them,”* Rama stated. (www.top-channel.tv)

- May 9th, in an interview with Shekulli newspaper, Deputy Chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag responsible for foreign, defense and security policy and the Council of Europe Dr. Johann David Wadehul said that Albania finds itself in a dangerous political crisis. *“Albania finds himself in a dangerous political crisis. This is bad for the EU perspective of the country. It is therefore the duty of all pro-European parties in Government and opposition to approach each other and be prepared to make real compromises. If both sides are not prepared to do so, they question their country’s EU perspective,”* Wadehul said. Further on, Wadehul said if the Government and opposition continue like this, they will strengthen those forces that want to promote nationalism and pursue the path of a grander Albania, as well as encourage third powers to intervene in Albania’s affairs. *“To say it bluntly; Grand Albanian plans will be the end of Albania’s EU perspective! That is why the Government and opposition have a responsibility to overcome the crisis immediately. Even if the Rama Government has a majority in Parliament, it must be prepared to make real*

compromises. We are prepared to help overcome the crisis if both sides have the will to do so,” he said. Among the obstacles, he mentioned the ever-present need to advance the fight against corruption and organized crime, in order for the country to meet the conditions to open accession negotiations. In this regard, he said the implementation of laws is particularly important. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- May 12th, Albanian opposition protesters hurled petrol bombs at the entrance of Prime Minister Edi Rama’s office on Saturday, after three months of demonstrations calling for him to quit over alleged election fraud and corruption. Chanting *“We want a European Albania,”* the slogan of pro-democracy protests when the Balkan country dumped communism in 1990 they renewed the call they made since February for snap polls after their lawmakers also cut ties with Parliament. Some protesters, including a group with masked faces, hurled petrol bombs, firecrackers and paint at the entrance of the Government building and later at Parliament. A dozen Policemen and several protesters were hurt, Police and reporters said. During a lull in the attacks at the premier’s building, opposition Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) leader Lulzim Basha said they were *“determined to keep waging a bigger and more resolute battle as long as the Government was keeping Albania apart from Europe.”* *“We are here with a mission, to liberate Albania from crime and corruption, to make Albania like the rest of Europe,”* Basha told a crowd of several thousand along the main boulevard. Recognizing progress, the European Commission recommended Albania start accession talks last year, but the European

Council delayed the decision for this year in June as Albania overhauls its judiciary to flush out corrupt judges. Then the crowd moved near the Parliament building where a group of protesters kept hurling petrol bombs and firecrackers, to which Police responded with tear gas and water jets. After four hours, the crowd moved to the Tirana Police precinct to protest the arrest of a PD official. Calling the opposition's policies "blind," Rama said he was saddened to hear an opposition leader begging the Government to resign, and their fire harmed not his Government but the country. The EU and the US have called the Government legitimate, and have urged the opposition to return to Parliament and take part in local elections on June 30th, 2019. "The opposition's stated objective to make Albania's democracy stronger runs counter to the violence currently being perpetrated by protesters," the United States Embassy said in a statement, condemning the violence and calling for restraint. (www.reuters.com)



Protest on May 11th, 2019
(Photo source: www.pd.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Albania has entered in a period of political turmoil and fragile political stability not only because opposition organizes huge protests against the Government, but because opposition

MPs decided to abandon Parliament and resign aiming at blocking Parliament's works. Such decision was strongly criticized by the international community namely the EU and U.S putting at risk the opening of accession negotiations in June 2019. Opposition hardened its protests last weekend using violence. Albanian political crisis is getting deeper and deeper undermining Albania's EU future. Local elections scheduled for June 30th, 2019 is the milestone of rapid political developments in the country. The ruling socialists push by any mean to conduct the elections, while opposition declares that there will be no elections. Escalation of tension including violent incidents is highly expected as we approach to the election date. PD and LSI leaders, Basha and Kryemadhi respectively pushing for the Government's topple and snap elections. International community strongly supports Rama urging opposition to follow parliamentary procedures avoiding its unconventional practices. It is not normal for a stable country seeking to enter the European club to face such situation of political abnormality. Opposition MPs' resignation aiming at forcing the Government in collapse is not a reasonable political strategy for a functional and stable democracy. It is assessed that Rama is stabilizing situation eliminating possibilities for snap elections. The Government is accused of having links with organized crime and current situation raises questions over the power of "Albanian mafia" in the country and its influence in state's politics. Undoubtedly, corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state's problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in

justice sector. The final decision for opening Albania's accession negotiations in June 2019 is up to the EU Heads of Governments. One should underline that unofficial concerns have already been raised regarding this date due to current political instability. Failure of opening accession talks with the EU it will further destabilize the country toppling the Government. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a "mother nation." The state maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. In this context, the Albanian Prime Minister and his Government work on promoting Kosovo interests in international community using any forum they have access. Possible border changes may engage Albania in dangerous situations taking into consideration that it has the role of "protector" of Albanians in the region.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

May 6th, Admiral James Foggo, Commander of the Joint Command of Allied Forces in Naples, met with BiH Presidency members Zeljko Komsic and Sefik Dzaferovic, telling them that it is time for BiH to hand over the Annual State Program (ANP). Komsic and Dzaferovic introduced Admiral Fogg with aspirations and fulfilling the conditions of BiH's Euro-Atlantic integration, which equally imply the EU and NATO, pointing out that the rejection of this road does not lead to the stability and security of BiH. They thanked for the decisive role NATO has had in stopping the recent war, establishing peace and reforming the defense-security sector in BiH.

They pointed out that the submission of the Annual State Program (ANP) to compliance with the laws passed in the field of defense and that this is the question of the rule of law. Admiral Foggo thinks that it is time for BiH to hand over the ANP and it is his opinion that his postponement would risk creating "bad images" for the European Bank for Regional Development (EBRD) bankers who will arrive in Sarajevo this week as part of the Third EBRD Summit. He stressed that the authorities of BiH are themselves preparing their annual state program and have full control over its content. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- May 10th, the Chairman of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency, Milorad Dodik, said that the dispute between Bosnia and Croatia over pre-war property must be solved so that it is returned to its rightful owners. The quarrel over Bosnia's property in Croatia is dragging on for decades and came back into focus after Croatia recently adopted controversial laws that Bosnians believe could lead to them losing numerous hotels on the Adriatic coast, as well as other buildings. That property must be returned to the rightful owners, Dodik told reporters in the Serbian city of Nis. *"That is our property. Croatia was not acting correctly when it imposed solutions that enabled it to rent out other people's property,"* Dodik said. *"It could have forced the owners to do something with it but it could have not use the property and on the top of that to ban the owner of even approaching it for the next 20 years,"* he said. He also touched upon other open issues between the two countries, such as the construction of the Peljesac Bridge. The bridge is supposed to link the Croatian mainland and the

Peljesac Peninsula, bypassing a 15 kilometers-long strip around the city of Neum which is Bosnia and Herzegovina's only coast on the Adriatic Sea. Predominantly Bosniak political parties are opposing the construction of the Peljesac Bridge because they believe it might prevent large vessels from entering Bosnia's Bay of Neum, threatening the country's access to the open sea. *"Some in Bosnia and Herzegovina believe that this issue should be brought before international Courts. I think the Peljesac Bridge is a done deal and that it is up to Croatia, but it creates problems regarding state relations,"* he said. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- May 12th, Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik said it was a mistake to abolish the Army of Republika Srpska (RS), Bosnia's Serb-dominated entity that he represents in the state-level institutions, stressing that this, as well as the formation of Bosnia's Armed Forces, happened under the international pressure. Dodik spoke at a ceremony marking the Day of RS Army and the Day of the Third Infantry Regiment in the northwestern city of Banja Luka, Republika Srpska's administrative centre. The Third Infantry Regiment, which is formally part of Bosnia's Armed Forces, has a *"Supreme Command in Banja Luka,"* Dodik said adding that the army of the RS *"lives in hearts and souls of the Serbs"* and that the Third Infantry Regiment's members *"will always defend the freedom of the RS and its people."* Eight years after the end of the 1992-95 armed conflict in Bosnia, the country conducted defense reform, merging the Republika Srpska's and the Federation's entity armies into one, with the command at the state level. The reform process was mediated by the High Representative,

the international community's top administrator in Bosnia, installed to oversee the implementation of the Peace Agreement that ended the conflict of the early 1990s. Soon after the reform, the country was offered to join NATO's Partnership for Peace, which its authorities accepted. However, the road to the full membership in the alliance has been in a deadlock for years mostly due to rejection of authorities of the Serb-led entity. The RS Parliament's decision on military neutrality from 2017, Dodik said at the Sunday's ceremony, will be fully respected. *"We will not let anyone play with the decisions of the RS National Assembly,"* he added. Bosnian Serb leader called on the Regiment's Command to make half of the unit wear wartime uniforms on the next year's ceremony because, as he said, this is their day. Alongside the Republika Srpska's top officials, the ceremony was also attended by the Serbian Army's Chief of Staff General Milan Mojsilovic and Serbian Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin. *"RS does not have its own army but the Serb people do,"* said the Minister. *"If there had been no persistent and brave army of the RS and the Serb people, as well as the great solidarity of all Serbs wherever they are, the RS would not have been created,"* he added. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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

cooperate in forming a Government and it is a matter of time it will be officially announced. It seems that the three parties achieved to bypass their different views on main issues and especially Bosnia's accession process towards NATO. Bosnian Serbs insist that the country should remain neutral staying out of NATO, Bosniaks remain committed to NATO accession as a precondition for supporting a Government, while Bosnian Croats appears neutral on the issue wishing to overcome the deadlock. Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs destabilizing the state. Of course, both entities (Croats and Serbs) take in advantage "Dayton Peace Agreement" weaknesses and malfunctions. Russia pays special attention in Serbia and Bosnia in order to maintain its influence in the region. Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, and Montenegro have already entered NATO, while North Macedonia would join the Alliance within 2019. These two countries (Serbia and Bosnia) are the only "vehicles" for Russia to maintain a narrow influence in Southeastern Europe. Apart from external influence and intervention the country has to confront several internal "threats" which undermine its sovereignty, cohesion, and viability. Establishment of auxiliary Police Unit by RS raised tension between the FBiH and the Serbian entity emerging the mistrust between the state's communities. Election of ultra nationalist pro-Russian Serb Milorad Dodik in the tripartite Presidency is a strong sign of more nationalistic

rhetoric and more obstacles towards Bosnia's EU and NATO (mostly) integration. Dodik is a person who does not actually believe in B&H viability and is expected to promote (actually, he has already started) his own political agenda. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests.



BULGARIA: May 7th, Bulgarian delegation composed of representatives of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy, and experts from the Bulgarian Air Forces begin negotiations in the USA for the acquisition of 8 multi-role F-16 fighter jets. Bulgaria's Minister of Defense Krasimir Karakachanov said that Bulgaria will negotiate within the financial parameters set by the Bulgarian National Assembly-between 771 and 925 million euro. Karakachanov expects that the contract for the acquisition of F-16 fighter aircrafts will be signed in June or July this year. One month ago the USA voiced readiness to supply the 8 F-16 fighter jets two years after the signed contract. (www.novinite.com)

- May 8th, Prime Minister Boyko Borisov rejected any possibility to resign after the European Parliament elections. "First, these are European elections. In addition, we gave 9 million only for machine vote. An election is over 53-54 million, to make new elections, and October elections - 160 million to give for elections, we have to be cautious..." he argued before bTV. (www.novinite.com)

- May 12th, Political controversy has erupted in Bulgaria over reported comments by Turkish Ambassador Hasan Ulusoy calling on the state to encourage the study of Turkish as a foreign language. Ulusoy was reported to have said that Turkish investors in Bulgaria wanted their employees to know the Turkish language, and doing so would encourage Turkish investments in the country. Relations with Turkey are always a complex domestic political issue in Bulgaria, given how nationalists tend to invoke the five centuries of Ottoman rule, and May 2019 would hardly be the first time that relations with Ankara become a political football. The reported statements by Ulusoy brought reactions from Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Stsialisticheska Partiya - BSP) leader Kornelia Ninova, whose parties are in a tight race in the May 2019 European Parliament vote, as well as from the Bulgarian nationalist IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement or IMRO-BNM (VMRO – Bulgarsko Natsionalno Dvizhenie). The reports also led to an announcement by Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva that she had told Ulusoy to come to the ministry on May 12th, 2019 to explain his words. “*The Ambassador’s words sound disturbing because the Bulgarian Government has never hindered freely learning a foreign language,*” a Foreign Ministry statement on May 11th, 2019 said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bulgaria has not entered yet in political instability but a potential major crisis is always a possibility. The junior partner of the ruling coalition, United Patriots remains the vulnerable

and unpredictable piece of the inter-governmental stability; none could predict when a new incident or dispute will break out. Thus, Bulgaria has entered in a period of rather stable political situation. The President Radev grabs every opportunity to criticize the Government (and the Prime Minister Borissov) highlighting his different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Opposition BSP tries to push further Borisov and his Government by strengthening its rhetoric and having tabled three motions of no confidence so far. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. However, the EC made clear that Bulgaria could not enter the Eurozone before 2022. Apart from that the European Parliament adopted a resolution for the accession of Bulgaria (and Romania) in Schengen Zone. However, it is questioned if the European Council will receive a unanimous final decision for Bulgaria under the current migration pressure. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Although modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc) military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards. The latest report on defense situation confirmed the major problems the Bulgarian Armed Forces are facing. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: May 6th, a delegation of potential investors from China's state-owned China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation, led by

CSIC chairman Hu Wenming, visited the troubled shipyards of Uljanik group at the beginning of the month to discuss a possible investment or partnership agreement. According to information provided by the Government and CSIC, a response is expected in the next week or so. At the same time, Minister of Economy Darko Horvat called for patience. *"I think it's too hasty to demand a relevant response immediately,"* said Horvat adding *"so I call for more patience."* The Minister said it was important to give the company more time to reflect on their proposal and exactly what they saw for the shipyards moving forward. The two shipyards, Uljanik and Treci Maj, owned by the Uljanik Group, have been facing severe financial difficulties since last summer, resulting in months of unpaid salaries and frozen accounts. The Croatian Government continues to seek a sustainable restructuring plan but has yet to find an ideal solution. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- May 8th, enlargement of the EU will be one of Croatia's priorities and it will help candidates on their journey toward membership, Croatia's Foreign and European Affairs Minister Marija Pejcinovic-Buric said at ministerial meeting of the Adriatic-Ionian region held in Budva, Montenegro. A forum of the EU Adriatic-Ionian Strategy was held there on Tuesday and Wednesday. Since 2014, Brussels has endeavored to establish cooperation between member states and membership candidate countries from Southeast Europe. Officials from Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, and Greece attended the meeting along with officials from Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Albania and San Marino. *"Enlargement will be*

one of Croatia's priorities next year," Pejcinovic-Buric said. This was the last meeting of Ministers from the region before Croatia takes over the Chairmanship of the Council of the EU in January 2020. *"We believe that 70 million residents who live in the Adriatic-Ionian region and that it encompasses four member states and others outside of (the EU) represent potential for cooperation,"* the Minister told reporters. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- May 12th, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said that he respects every referendum initiative and that Parliament would decide on the union-led referendum initiative *"67 is too much"* after examining the signatures gathered for a referendum petition. The initiative's organizers announced at a midnight press conference that they had gathered over 600,000 signatures for a referendum against the statutory retirement age being raised to 67. *"I respect every referendum initiative, including this one. Parliament will decide on this matter after the signatures have been presented,"* Plenkovic told reporters in Zagreb. Asked if Parliament would ask the Constitutional Court to assess whether the referendum question was in line with the Constitution, the Prime Minister said that this would be decided by Parliament. Opposition Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske - SDP) and Bridge of Independent Lists (Most Nezavisnih Lista - Most) parties expressed strong support to the union-led initiative aimed at the pension system reform. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

Croatia follows a tough regional policy with neighboring countries. It is openly intervene in Bosnia's internal affairs, while it maintains open disputes with Slovenia, Serbia, and Bosnia. It is estimated Croatia tries to establish a leading role in Western Balkans not only as an EU and NATO member state but also as a rising "local" (Western Balkans) power. One should take into consideration that Croatia shows its military strength and capabilities quite often not only in international, but also in national level sending strong messages to neighboring countries. Apart from that, Croatia pays special attention in energy strategy and security announcing ambitious projects. The state enjoys political stability, while its economy is growing. Border dispute on Piran Bay remains active and Slovenia's initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone, while the EC sends good news regarding Croatia's fiscal policy. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.



CYPRUS: May 9th, the four-party coalition "Government" in the occupied north Cyprus officially collapsed on Thursday after "Prime Minister" Tufan Erhurman handed in his resignation to leader Mustafa Akinci following a rift between the partners over the lease of "state" land to the son of Serdar Denktash. Erhurman's

resignation followed those of two of his coalition partners, the Head of the People's Party (Halkın Partisi - HP), Kudret Ozersay who was Deputy "Prime Minister" and "Minister of Foreign Affairs," and Head of the Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti - DP) Serdar Denktash who was "Finance Minister." The other two parties forming the coalition were Erhurman's Republican Turkish Party (Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi - CTP) and the Communal Democracy Party (Toplumcu Demokrasi Partisi - TDP) headed by Cemal Ozyigit who was "Minister of Education." Accepting Erhurman's resignation, Akinci said that he believed that he had worked in harmony and dialogue with the four-party coalition. He added he would give a few days to the parties to consult among themselves, while he will hold separate meetings next week with the Heads of "parliamentary" parties and would assign one of them to form a "Government" that could secure a vote of confidence in "Parliament." Pointing out that this was the first four-party coalition in the north, Akinci said that Erhurman's job had not been easy. He said he asked Erhurman to remain in "Office" until a new "Government" was formed. Denktash resigned on Wednesday afternoon following reaction by his coalition partners after it emerged his "Ministry" leased his son "state" land for 10 years for the construction of a university that would bear the name of former Turkish Cypriot leader, the late Rauf Denktash, father of the DP party leader. Ozersay, who had requested cancellation of the lease agreement in question, resigned late on Wednesday citing a confidence crisis among the coalition partners. Erhurman said that the most appropriate thing would be for Akinci to assign to the party with the largest number of seats in

“Parliament” to form a “Government” and this would be National Unity Party (Ulusal Birlik Partisi – UBP) leader Ersin Tatar. Tatar said on Wednesday his party is ready for talks with HP. Noting that the two parties would jointly have 30 “Deputies” in “Parliament,” Tatar argued that they did not have ideological differences, especially on the Cyprus Problem. Ozersay said his party members would decide on whether they would continue as an opposition party or proceed with negotiations to form a “Government.” According to media reports in the north, Erhurman said that it is important to form a new “Government” as soon as possible due to the economic crisis the regime is currently facing. *“It is important to have a stable ‘Government’ during times like these. I would like to wish the new ‘Government’ all the best because we are truly going through a difficult time,”* he said. On whether early elections are on the horizon, Erhurman said that there is the necessary number of MPs in “Parliament” for alternative coalition scenarios but as the “Constitution” states, early elections will be held if coalition talks fail. Erhan Arikli, leader of the Rebirth Party (Yeniden Doğuş Partisi - YDP) estimated that UBP will form a coalition “Government” with HP, the economic protocol with Turkey will be signed immediately and the flow of money will begin. He added that in case the UBP-HP does not form a coalition “Government” his party is ready to support a UBP-DP minority “Government.” The four parties that control 27 out of the 50 seats in “Parliament” formed a coalition “Government” in February 2018 following early elections. UBP took first place at those elections but failed to win a majority and found itself outside the

“Government” after failing to forge a coalition with other parties. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 12th, talks between Total and Eni and the Government to explore Block 7 of Cyprus’ EEZ are at an advanced stage and the announcement of an agreement is only a matter of time a Government source told state broadcaster CyBC, it announced. According to the same source the results seen in the Calypso are expected to be similar to those in block 7 and the energy giant has asked for rights to the whole field. Meanwhile, according to the CyBC a study carried out in Texas points to further large finds expected in the Cyprus EEZ. In October the Government asked for interest in Block 7 from companies already working in neighboring plots. Energy Minister Giorgos Lakkotrypīs said at the time that this option had been chosen instead of launching another licensing round because *“there are particular geological reasons related to the Calypso discovery.”* The Calypso field is located in block 6 where Italy’s ENI carried out an exploratory drill early this year and is believed to hold between six and eight trillion cubic feet. In February ExxonMobil announced a gas find estimated between 5-8 trillion cubic feet (tcf) in an offshore field inside the island’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The discovery was made in the Glafcos (Glaucus) 1 well in Block 10 of the EEZ. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 12th, Turkey’s illegal activities in the island’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) constitute an unprecedented violation of Cyprus’ sovereign rights, revealing the true intentions of Turkey in relation to the Cyprus problem and undermining security in the region, Defense Minister Savvas Angelides said. He reiterated that

the National Council on Saturday said that without an end to illegal activities in the EEZ there can be no prospects for resolving the Cyprus problem. *“The Government continues to take action on various fronts in order to end Turkey’s flagrant violation of Cyprus’ EEZ. We definitely do not stop here, we continue with various actions on different fronts so that we have a substantial result, which is the end of this illegality,”* he continued. Speaking in Greece, Greek Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Terence Quick said Turkey’s provocative actions in Cyprus’ EEZ constitute a blatant new challenge to the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus and demonstrate Turkey’s negative attitude to all members of the international community. Speaking at the Congress of Cypriot Organizations in Greece, he said *“Athens and Nicosia will use all the means available to ensure our rights against anyone who acts in violation of International Law.”* The Turkish drillship Fatih is in the northern part of Cyprus’ EEZ accompanied by three other vessels. Although the Turkish drillship is operating in the Cypriot EEZ, it is located in an area that has not been licensed by Cyprus for hydrocarbons exploration. The Government has received the backing of the EU, the US and others over the incident. On Sunday a high ranking Turkish diplomat has said Turkey has sent a message to Greece, Cyprus and the EU that it will not back off from its claims in the Eastern Mediterranean, Sky Greece reported on Sunday. In social media, the General Secretary of the Turkish Foreign Ministry reportedly said it is not possible for Greek island to have full control over setting who has rights to the sea. He described the approach of Athens and Nicosia as *“maximalist,”* claiming that ownership of islands does not confer full rights on

the demarcation of marine areas. Earlier Spokesman of Turkish ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) Omer Celik called on President Nicos Anastasiades to remember the events of 1974 and to keep them in his mind. He said marine boundaries are set after agreements or Court decisions, suggesting that Greece and Cyprus are violating the *“possible boundaries”* of Turkish zones. *“In the absence of settlement, the overlapping claims prevail,”* he added justifying Ankara’s behavior in the Mediterranean and the Aegean. Foreign Minister Nicos Christodoulides traveled to Brussels on Sunday afternoon to attend the EU’s Foreign Affairs Council where he will brief his counterparts on Turkey’s provocations in the EEZ. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus faces an ongoing crisis within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (not officially delimited yet) with the Turkish drillship Fatih ready to start oil and gas drills 50 nm west of Pafos. Direct violation of its sovereign rights which aim at establishing “fait accompli” in a maritime area Turkey claims it enjoys full rights to exploit, is a serious evolving situation which should be resolved. It looks like Cyprus (and Greece) did not have a resolution plan for such situation although it was an expected and predicted Turkish reaction. Diplomatic support of the US and EU through statements is not enough to deter Turkey from its operational plans. Cyprus should push the EU for specific sanctions against Turkey as a direct measure of pressure. To conclude, Cyprus should stop immediately this situation which threatens its sovereignty. Escalation

of tension including armed violence could not be excluded. Despite current situation, Cyprus works systematically in order to become a major part of the East Mediterranean energy hub. It is favored not only by its natural gas deposits, but also by its strategic position in the “heart” of East Mediterranean Sea and of course of being an EU member state. The strategy of multilateral cooperation seems to be fruitful. At the moment, Cyprus is engaged in three different trilateral formations which also include strong features of strategic cooperation and alliance; Cyprus – Egypt – Greece, Cyprus – Israel – Greece, and Cyprus – Jordan – Greece. The last two are highly improved due to the US engagement. At the moment Cyprus is promoting a fourth model of cooperation between Cyprus, Greece, and Lebanon. Apart from that, participating countries in these trilateral models seek to start interacting; it was announced that the meeting between Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt will be widened including Jordan and Iraq. In other words, Cyprus is becoming the “leading link” between the Middle East and the Arab world on the one hand and the EU on the other. Cyprus seeks to negotiate and reach agreements with its neighboring countries regarding their EEZ expanding maritime cooperation and energy security. Turkey looks like being isolated from the energy game and its current aggressive reaction is attributed to this situation. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Cyprus improved its bilateral relations with the US, strengthened its defense cooperation with France, UK, and lately develops its defense and security relations with Germany. One could say that Cyprus strengthens defense cooperation with

NATO leading countries. The US administration promotes abolishment of the arms embargo against Cyprus allowing it to improve its military capabilities. Conduct of aeronautical exercises in cooperation with other countries (Israel, Egypt etc) sends various messages of defense capability, readiness, and determination. Although the UN Secretary General appears optimistic for a new round of talks between the two communities, it is assessed that talks could not be resumed with vessels violating Cypriot sovereignty. President Anastasiades promotes the scenario of a “bizonal, bicomunal decentralized federation”; an idea which is in principle accepted by the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community and enjoys support from the U.S. However, there are a lot of disputed issues in which both parts should compromise; the most important is considered the decision-making process. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: May 10th, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis clashed again on Friday night, ahead of a confidence vote in the Government, though the rhetoric was less intense than Wednesday’s personal exchange. As expected, the Government won the confidence vote with 153 MPs supporting it and 136 opposing it in a 300 seats Parliament. In his speech before the vote, Tsipras claimed that, despite his criticism, Mitsotakis actually agrees with the social benefits the premier

announced earlier this week, while also condemning the conservative leader's economic program as being "*pro-elite*." Meanwhile Mitsotakis, whose party is leading leftist Coalition of Radical left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) in public opinion polls, said Tsipras should call snap general elections if he loses the European Parliament polls later this month. The European elections will "*be a vote of disapproval for the worst Government Greece has known since the restoration of democracy*," Mitsotakis said, referring to the end of the country's 1967-1974 military dictatorship. Both leaders claimed not to be to blame for Wednesday's ugly exchange in the House. Tsipras said it was not his choice for tensions to rise to the extent that they did, claiming that ND aims to turn the pre-election period into an "*arena*." Mitsotakis, for his part, blamed the Prime Minister for setting the tone. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 12th, Opposition leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis has called on Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to resign on May 26th, 2019 and call an early national election if he loses the election for the European Parliament two weeks from now. Most polls show Mitsotakis' New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) with a comfortable lead over the ruling Coalition of Radical left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA). In a press conference carried live on most Greek TV channels, Mitsotakis chided Tsipras for promising an extra month's pay to pensioners ahead of the election, but added his party will vote for the one-off "*allowance*," as he called it. Mitsotakis challenged Tsipras to accept his party proposal not to lower the tax-free

income bracket, saying not accepting it would be hypocritical. In any case, he said, a ND Government would implement this proposal. Commenting on the attacks on riot Police early Sunday, a phenomenon which regularly occurs in the Athens center, Mitsotakis said the current Government lacks the "*political will*" to deal with security issues. He promised hiring new Police, and adding new Police patrol cars. On foreign issues, Mitsotakis called out Turkey for its provocative decision to drill for oil and natural gas inside Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone, saying that his Government will not tolerate a policy that questions Cyprus' sovereign rights. Turkey must make some signs of goodwill to Greece and Cyprus, he added. Mitsotakis, whose party opposed the agreement that led Greece's northern neighbor to change its constitutional name to North Macedonia, said that the treaty does not allow Greece to veto the EU's starting accession negotiations with North Macedonia. He said he would fight any attempts by the neighboring country to monopolize the brand name "*Macedonia*" or "*Macedonian*" for its products and that he will aid Greek enterprises based in the northern Greek region of Macedonia to protect their brands. Mitsotakis added that "*with this SYRIZA*" there is no prospect of forming a German-style grand coalition Government, thereby leaving an opening of a different outcome with a Syriza not led by Tsipras. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 12th, Greece's Foreign Ministry has responded strongly to a claim by the Turkish one that Greece wants to drag NATO into a dispute between itself and Turkey. Earlier Sunday, Turkish Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hami

Aksoy denounced “the attempts of Greece, our neighbor and Ally, to abuse international organizations, including NATO, and draw them into these disputes with the aim of justifying its national positions,” adding they are not new. Aksoy reiterated Turkey’s current position that “the Eastern Aegean islands were put under demilitarized status by virtue of several international agreements, including the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 and the Treaty of Paris of 1947” and that, therefore, “the military vessels operating in the Aegean Sea under the NATO Activity would refrain from visiting the Aegean islands under demilitarized status according to international law, including with the aim of refueling or port visits.” Violating these conditions, Aksoy said, would also violate “the Alliance’s policy of refraining from involvement in bilateral disputes between Allies.” In response, Greek Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman Alexandros Gennimatas said that “such unacceptable and unfounded claims against Greece undermine the stability of the area and the cohesion of the Alliance. Similar claims have absolutely no footing in international law and have been answered appropriately and repeatedly.” (www.ekathimerini.gr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Ruling SYRIZA got a confidence vote and continues for the European Parliament and local elections. It was his strategic choice not to call early parliamentary elections on May 26th, 2019 together with the EU and local ones taking a big risk to conduct national elections later in the summer or in autumn 2019 carrying the burden of a possible defeat in the European and local

elections. It is assessed that the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras counts on a small scale defeat (up to 2-3%) in the coming European elections having the necessary political time to reverse the internal political atmosphere and finally to win the national elections. In this context, European Parliament and local elections are of significant importance in Greece being somekind of political referendum. That is why opposition leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis urged Tsipras to call snap election if he loses the European one. The Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras focuses on approaching the center-left voters and weakening KINAL (former PASOK). Moreover, the ruling SYRIZA intensifies its efforts to gain the electoral body by announcing social care measures and benefits. Political uncertainty emerged in a period where Greece faces several diplomatic, security, and economic challenges. Internal terrorism is considered as a major unresolved problem of national security undermining stability of the state. Greek – Turkish relations are deteriorating due to Turkey’s decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills. Moreover, Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial and maritime sovereign rights and Greece’s right to militarize East Aegean Sea islands. A crisis to Cyprus means a crisis to Greece forcing Armed Forces to deploy military, naval, and air units. Taking into consideration that Cyprus lacks of naval and air power it is Greece which will support the small and vulnerable island located in the East Mediterranean heart. Turkish fighter jets intensified their activity regarding violation of Greek airspace and issue of NAVTEXs within Greek territorial waters for military exercises

(including fires). Strengthening of military cooperation between Greece and the US upgrades Greece's strategic role in Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East as a western (US, EU, NATO) forward military base. On the other hand, Greece is concerned that this upgraded relation with the US may reinforce Turkish aggression in the Aegean Sea. Furthermore, Greece seeks to modernize its Armed Forces by receiving US military aid. It is a fact that Greek military force has been affected by the long economic crisis threatening the balance of power with Turkey. Security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ.



KOSOVO: May 8th, Ramush

Haradinaj, Kosovo's Prime Minister, said there is a suspicion that Pristina, Belgrade, Tirana and Brussels debated the division of Kosovo, the Beta news agency reported. Addressing the round table on Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on normalization of relations under the EU auspices, Haradinaj said the Presidents of Kosovo and Serbia, Hashim Thaci and Aleksandar Vucic and Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama together with the EU High Representative and the mediator of the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue Federica Mogherini, discussed how to divide Kosovo. *“It is good they apologized for wasting time on that. It could have been much worse,”* Haradinaj said but did not mention any source of that speculation. He added that Kosovo did not need to open question on how it declared the independence in 2008 and which the International Justice Court ruled on. *“I guarantee that anyone who says that border change or its*

correction will bring peace should know that will not bring peace but war and tragedy,” Haradinaj said, adding that those who advocated a deal on border changes did that deliberately to have at least two more decades of instability in the Balkans. Late on Tuesday, Serbian President Alexandar Vucic said he would not recognize Kosovo within its current borders, and in the summer of 2018, he said he favored the separation with Albanians but did not specify. Last night he complained that public at home and the international community did not have understanding for his proposal and also refused to say what he proposed and whom to, but added it was about a fair border. Thaci's idea on border correction is the annexation of Serbia's south-western region of Presevo Valley mostly populated by ethnic Albanians, but without any territory swap in return. Some Western politicians said they would not mind any solution both Belgrade and Pristina would agree on, as long as it would be in line with the international law. The others, mainly Germany, strongly opposed any border changes fearing the domino effect in the region. (www.balkaninfo.com)

- May 9th, Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci, called as failure the Western Balkans Summit held last month in Berlin, which as Thaci said was held without coordination with the US. Thaci said that dialogue with Serbia should not be conditioned with revocation of 100% tax on Serbian goods. According to Thaci, Kosovo Government's decision to introduce tariffs on Serbian goods was a fair decision and said that the tax will not be revoked. Speaking to Tirana based TV Ora, Thaci called as good news engagement of Germany and France to solve Kosovo-Serbia

issue. However, Thaci said that during the Berlin Summit it was proved that the EU is weak and not united to impose a solution in Kosovo-Serbia relations. Thaci continues backing his idea on correction of border with Serbia, namely unification of Presheva, Medvegja and Bujanovac with Kosovo territory, a proposal which according to media and analysts was opposed by Germany and France during the Berlin Summit last month. *“I want to emphasize that correction of historic injustice should happen, and Presheva, Medvegja and Bujanovac to join Kosovo territory, in a process which would accelerate the European future of Serbia,”* Thaci said. According to Thaci the US play an important role in solving problems in Balkans. *“I was terrified to learn that during the Berlin Summit there was no communication with the US. Without the US involvement there is no success, no guarantee on dialogue or implementation of any potential agreement,”* Thaci stated. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- May 9th, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci who was in Tirana attending the regional Brdo-Brijuni Process met Wednesday Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama. Thaci said that he discussed with Rama on modalities of complete removing Kosovo-Albania border controls. *“Yesterday we had a very open discussion with Albanian Prime Minister Rama on modalities of completely removing of border between Kosovo and Albania based on a European model under the umbrella of the Euro-Atlantic values,”* Thaci said. He said that no one should feel threatened the communication and national integration as well as freedom of movement in territories where Albanians live. *“No one should be afraid of this position we hold, we should also not be afraid of the reaction of*

Serbian President,” Thaci said referring to reaction of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and other Serbian officials who stated that Thaci and Rama are working for creation of Greater Albania. According to Thaci as part of this national integration Presheva, Medvegja and Bujanoc will join Kosovo. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Haradinaj (and Thaci, after the Berlin summit) insists on his decision to impose 100% tax on Serbian and Bosnian products which has led negotiation process into a deadlock. The international community namely the EU and U.S have put a lot of pressure on the Government to suspend taxes. Next meeting will be held on July 2019 in Paris and Kosovo top officials try to establish a united negotiation team. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. The state's authorities show a tendency of escalating tension with Serbia undermining a peaceful resolution of the case. By imposing 100% tariff on Serbian (and Bosnian products), establishing Kosovo army, executing Special Forces operation in northern Kosovo, arresting Serbs, and requesting special court for Serbs it is created a climate which does not facilitate dialogue and the establishment of confidence between the two parties. President Thaci insists once again on Kosovo – Serbia land swap but only for Kosovo annex Presevo, Medvja and Bujanovac where ethnic Albanians are the majority. Mayoral elections in the North (of Serbian majority) scheduled for May 19th, 2019

offer fertile soil for provocations or violent incidents. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. Establishment of Kosovo Army is also a factor of destabilization since there is always a possibility of Police or military engagement with Serbian forces. Kosovo seeks KSF to be operating all over the country pushing NATO towards such direction. The presence of Kosovo Army in the north it is assessed of high security risk which may lead in armed violence. One should take into consideration that the Serb President has already ordered all defense and security stakeholders to take all necessary measures for protecting Serbian population in Kosovo.



MOLDOVA: May 10th, co-leader of the ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS)] bloc, Andrei Nastase said that the President Igor Dodon and current Prime Minister, Vladimir Plahotniuc have agreed to join political forces and cooperate. According to Nastase, Dodon seeks to enjoy Plahotniuc support for a second term as the Moldovan President. Nastase claimed that Dodon did not want to cooperate with ACUM; although Nastase proposed several solutions for cooperation, Dodon avoided any agreement finding various pretexts. According to Nastase, the deal between the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) and Democratic

Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM) has already been reached. ACUM co-leader claimed that his coalition party proposed to PSRM the Prime Minister office seeking to get the Parliament Speaker's post for its own. However, PSRM rejected such proposal requesting the Parliament Speaker's office. *"They are not interested in the country, they are not interested in the fact that we risk losing the IMF Agreement, we risk European funding, which is also suspended due to Plahotniuc and Dodon and the laws that voted together. They are not interested in the fact that the Republic of Moldova is going from worse to worse, poverty grows from day to day, people's exodus grows from one day to another,"* Nastase said at Free Europe. (www.jurnal.md)

- May 10th, leader of the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA), Andrei Nastase, intends to run again in the new mayoral race for the capital, Chisinau which should take place this summer. Parliament in Moldova has not yet set an exact date for the election. Nastase won the race last time in June 2018, but the result was then cancelled by the Courts in Chisinau, even though international observers ruled that the elections were free and fair. *"People of Chisinau have expectations [of us]. We cannot let them down,"* one of the leaders of PPDA told Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), confirming that Nastase intends to enter another mayoral race. PPDA Deputy Octavian Ticu said that Nastase would run again to become mayor of Chisinau. *"It is clear that Nastase will run again,"* said Ticu. Nastase won the second round of the local elections in Chisinau in June 2018, beating

pro-Russian Socialist Party candidate Ion Ceban. The result was relatively tight. Nastase won 52.57% of votes cast – a total of 129,432 votes – while Ceban won 47.43%, or 116,788 votes, according to the Central Election Commission, CEC. The turnout was 39.12%, according to the CEC. The Moldovan Supreme Court upheld the June 25th, 2018 ruling by a local Court that invalidated the June 3rd, 2018 local election result. After cancellation of the results, politicians in Moldova, the US, and EU voiced strong concerns over the independence of the Justice system in Moldova. Cancellation of the mayoral results infuriated the EU, and Brussels moved immediately to suspend micro-financial aid of 100 million euro for Moldova. Over the past two decades, the Chisinau mayoralty has remained in the hands of pro-European forces, and is seen as a symbol of the broadly pro-European path taken by the former Soviet republic. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- May 11th, there should not be allowed any unilateral action to obstruct things made for common citizens in the Transnistrian settlement process. The statement has been made in Chisinau by the Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration, Cristina Lesnic, after the meeting with OSCE Special Representative for the Transnistrian settlement process, Franco Frattini, who is paying a visit to Moldova. Lesnic has added that Chisinau is still advocating for a constructive and constant dialogue as to ensure the continuation of results. According to the official, it has been made some progress so far in terms of situation in schools with teaching in Romanian, claiming of agricultural land and access of farmers to these lands, but also in the process of re – registering

the means of transport and diplomas. *“I came to Chisinau in a transition period prior to formation of Government, which I hope will be formed before the deadline. I was assured of the political will of the authorities here, and I see that the process is not frozen, there are no blockages, the working groups work, and all these technical meetings continue,”* Frattini said. He added that the OSCE responsibility is to encourage and support the negotiation process, but no one can substitute the two sides involved in discussion, which have to talk and come up with ideas, proposals and solutions. (www.moldpres.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political deadlock continues in Moldova after parties failed to form a ruling majority so far. It seems that PSRM and ACUM block failed to reach an agreement leaving “free space” for a PSRM and PDM approach and agreement. Otherwise, snap elections are ahead. Political instability and uncertainty affect vitally in state’s function blocking reforms and keeping the country far from European standards. President Dodon benefits from political gap promoting a closer relation between his country and Russia. Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. Political situation in the country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which will strengthen state’s transparency, accountability, and democratic values. The current Government has walked into dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime and deep and determined justice reforms are needed. The U.S, EU and IMF express their

major concerns. The ongoing crisis between Russia and Ukraine may affect Moldova; First of all Russia maintains military forces in Transnistrian ground and secondly it shares common borders with Ukraine which cannot go unnoticed by international stakeholders. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: May 6th,

Defense Investment Plan has shown that Montenegro is committed to allocating defense spending to up to 2% of GDP, taking into account the overall burden on the Montenegrin budget, said Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Montenegro, Brigadier General Dragutin Dakic. He said that Montenegro's Plan of Investing in Defense for the period from 2018 to 2024 was adopted by the Government at the proposal of the Ministry of Defense.



Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Montenegro, Brigadier General Dragutin Dakic

(Photo source: www.vojaska.me)

“Increase in the defense budget is primarily aimed at creating the conditions for further

continuation of the reform of national defense system, equipping and modernizing Armed Forces, developing their capabilities and capacity and achieving the required level of interoperability, thus contributing development of capabilities and capacity of the Alliance,” Dakic said in an interview to agency Mina. According to him 80.19 million euro was planned to be invested in defense this year, i.e. 1.67% of the estimated GDP. *“From 2020 to 2024, the percentage of defense spending projected at 1.73% in 2020, 1.81% in 2021, 1.88% in 2022, 1.94% in 2023, to 2% in 2024,”* Dakic explained. He said that Montenegro, as the youngest NATO member, designated two infantry troops as declared units for NATO's capabilities targets. (www.cdm.me)

- May 9th, leaders of Democratic Front (Demokratski Front - DF), Andrija Mandic and Milan Knezevic, have been sentenced to five years in prison, by the decision of Judicial Council of Judge Suzana Mugosa at the Podgorica High Court, which found guilty all the accused for terrorist attack. Knezevic and Mandic were not present at the moment the sentence was pronounced. The DF driver Mihailo Cadenovic was sentenced by the Court to 18 months in prison, while the time already spent in the prison will be included in the sentence as Mugosa said. The longest prison sentence for attempted terrorism on the parliamentary elections' day in 2106 has been handed down to Eduard Shishmakov and Vladimir Popov, who were sentenced to 15 and 12 years in prison respectively. The verdict is the first instance verdict, it is not final, and an appeal or other remedy can be filed against it. Jeremy Hunt, the

British Foreign Secretary said that verdict against Russian citizens was the example of immoral attempts to undermine European democracy. Commenting on the sentences the US Embassy in Podgorica said that it was a historical day for the rule of law in Montenegro. (www.cdm.me, www.rtcg.me)

- May 9th, The “*Break Up*” (Odupri se) Movement said that it is not surprised by the decision of the Podgorica High Court which have been sentenced people who participated in the failed coup attempt during the elections of 2016. According to the Movement, in a “*private state there is not a Court that would dare to judge any political opponent on the basis of evidence and by law.*” “*At the same time, the owner and President of such a state is allowed to openly support a military coup in a friendly country calling for foreign military intervention,*” the movement’s statement said. Since October 16th, 2016 the country’s institutions and Government are based on illegitimate elections. “*We therefore call on all free citizens to join us in the next protests, to fight together for the liberation of captured institutions and preparing the first free elections, to end the 30-year autocratic rule of a leader and his party,*” the Movement said. (www.vijesti.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Massive protests against the President and high officials disturbed a period of “euphoria”, emerging state’s problems such as corruption, link between state’s politics and organized crime, money laundering, media freedom, and nepotism. Protest movement and opposition parties reached an agreement to join forces for toppling the Government ensuring fair and free elections. Of

course, under these circumstances polarization of political situation could not be excluded undermining the EU process of the country. Court verdict on DF members, Serbian and Russian citizens engaged in 2016 attempt coup was announced including high sentences for those involved. Although DF leadership implied strong protests and reactions nothing happened yet. State officials and Police announced that are ready to deal with any attempt to destabilize the country and disturb citizens security. However, there is always the possibility of violent incidents. In general, Montenegro has entered in a fragile period (following the Southeastern Europe trend!). The EP assessment was positive praising the state’s efforts to implement major reforms, but on the other hand it underlined the problems of the rule of law, media freedom, corruption, money laundering, and organized crime. However, the EP stated that Montenegro under certain conditions may be able to access the EU by 2025. It is assessed that the EU and U.S strongly supports the President Djukanovic and the Montenegrin Government despite corruption accusations as being the only loyal partner committed to the Western orientation of the state. In other words the west is closing its eyes in lack of democratic values and rule of law due to geopolitical interests namely Russian influence. The Government promotes state’s political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment. Although the Government takes concrete measures against corruption, organized crime, and money laundering it is assessed that a lot should be done to reach such a level of economic activity; mainly in the field of public administration, public sector corruption, and money laundering. Imprisonment

of opposition MPs is a worrying and alarming sign regarding rule of law and democratic values in the country. Montenegro shows activity within NATO trying to prove that it is an equal partner of the alliance with military capacity according to NATO standards. Moreover, it tries to modernize and strengthen its operational capabilities and in this context it raised its defense budget aiming at purchasing new assets such as armored vehicles.



NORTH MACEDONIA: May

7th, leader of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE), Hristijan Mickoski told a press conference after the presidential election results were announced, that the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija - SDSM) should expect “*political hell*” led by VMRO-DPMNE, as the largest political force in the country. Mickoski predicted that he would triumph at the next parliamentary elections, winning half a million votes. “*VMRO-DPMNE compared to the SDSM coalition, that ‘hotel coalition’, won the largest number of votes. VMRO-DPMNE had an excellent result. VMRO-DPMNE is again the largest political force in Macedonia [North Macedonia]. We were insulted, lied about, blackmailed, our political supporters were persecuted, we were denied finances which we are legally entitled to, but we worked together with the Professor [Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova], and we came close to*

380,000 votes. We will continue to work, and should they blackmail or lie about us, let them know that VMRO-DPMNE is a political root, we continue to work with twice as much energy to achieve the number that we deserve in the next parliamentary elections, which is half a million votes,” Mickoski said. The VMRO-DPMNE candidate, Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova said “The result, of course, is clear, but the question is whether this result, compared to the winner’s result, leads to reconciliation and unification or denotes a division within the country on multiple grounds, a division that has the character of inter-ethnic division?” adding “The result imposes a need for talks and negotiations on how to proceed, but I think that situation is such that we should seriously consider early parliamentary elections...” (www.meta.mk)

- May 8th, on the eve of the opening of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) General Assembly in Sarajevo, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev met with Deputy Assistant Secretary of European and Eurasian Affairs at the State Department, Matthew Palmer. Palmer noted that the successful presidential elections is pushing the country in the right direction and has eased efforts in setting a date for negotiations with the EU. “*Democratic, fair and crystal clear elections have confirmed that our country is becoming a mature democracy, and citizens have shown massive support to the concept of a society for everyone. We have shown that as a country we have the capacity to solve difficult issues, and now we are focused on the future and economic progress of the country. With 12 ratifications of the protocol for our NATO membership, positive effects and*

encouragement for new investments can already be felt. For us, it is very important for the European Union to give us a date for negotiations in June [2019] so the European dream of many generations of our citizens to come true,” Zaev said. (www.meta.mk)

- May 9th, North Macedonia's Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev is expected to reshuffle the cabinet in the days to come as he had previously announced. His ruling party, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija - SDSM) said that this move will also affect party senior officials, Ministers, MPs, Mayors and Head of departments. *“I am responsible for the executive power and there will be changes,”* Zaev said. Albanian party, Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI), which is part of the governing coalition, said that every decision should be taken in agreement with coalition partners. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister said that this move comes as a result of the fact that many people are unhappy with the current Government's performance. (www.nezavisen.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although candidate of the ruling SDSM, Stevo Pendarovski won the presidential race, the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev is determined to reshuffle the Government. VMRO-DPMNE declares that is the most powerful political force in the country since Pendarovski was elected by the ethnic Albanians massive voting in favor of him. Main opposition party insists that early parliamentary elections should be the next step. It is assessed that the EU will offer its support to Zaev by opening accession negotiations in coming June strengthening his

political power in the country. Then, Zaev will feel more comfortable to call for early elections. Apart from that, DUI the Albanian coalition partner of SDSM highlighted that any kind of reshuffle will be under coordination and agreement between the coalition partners. In other words, Zaev is not so stable and powerful after the presidential election. Two years after Zaev took office it looks like citizens are disappointed with the Government and its actions in several issues and that is alarming for the ruling SDSM. Ratification of NATO accession protocol by the member states proceeds rapidly. However, there is concern for Turkey's ratification due to the fact that it tried to connect the North Macedonia accession process to NATO with its demands over FETO persecution. Moreover, it seems that Turkey does not welcome the strengthening of North Macedonia – Greece relations; one should note that Greece has taken over North Macedonia's airspace protection in the context of NATO. The country should focus on its economy and major administrative and judicial reforms, fight against corruption and impunity aiming at reaching the EU standards. Needless to say that in a period where border questions are raised again in the Balkans North Macedonia achieved to strengthen its political stability and growth prospects.



ROMANIA: May 7th, Romania's Defense Ministry has sent a formal request to the Government of the US for the sale of refurbished F-16 aircrafts that the US can dispense, according to an official document consulted by Profit.ro. After buying 12 F-16 aircrafts from Portugal in the past years with the prospect of taking over

another five from the same country, Romania failed to find other NATO states ready to sell such aircrafts. In 2012, Romania's Supreme Defense Council (CNAS) decided to develop three battle squadrons equipped with 16 multirole aircrafts each. The country signed in 2013 a contract with Portugal worth 628 million euro for the acquisition of 12 F-16 fighters. The cost included the refurbishing of the aircraft by the US group Lockheed Martin and the training of the Romanian pilots. Romania still has to purchase some 36 aircrafts to complete the three proposed squadrons. The Portuguese Defense Ministry officially confirmed in July 2018 that it would sell another five F-16 fighters to Romania, but Romania has not been able to find a supplier for the other 31 combat planes it needs. (www.romania-insider.com)

- May 8th, President Klaus Iohannis has stated that Romania will be the Capital of Europe on May 9th, 2019, as Europe is coming to Sibiu for the EU informal summit. The Head of state argued that the summit must not be perceived as an isolated event, but in a wider European context, of the EP elections. *"The summit is important because it will prove to Romanians that Romania does matter in Europe, that Romanians' vote does count not only in Romania, but also in Europe,"* Klaus Iohannis said. He further pointed out that the campaign for the EP elections, for the referendum does matter as well, contradicting *"certain politicians that claim that the European elections and the referendum do not count too much. On the contrary, they do matter. Romanians have the chance to express their option, we are in a complicated period for Europe and for Romania, too, we are after two years and*

a half of failed PSD ruling. The Social Democrats have talked about highways, hospitals, kindergartens, they achieved nothing, they have just attacked the rule of law, the independence of justice, they managed to show Romania's ugly face to Europe, it is a pity for Romanians have worked hard." *"We also have populist leaders, famous people, who have a rather anti-European speech against foreigners, it is a pity. Romania deserves a pro-European speech. Romanians do not want to leave Europe. There is this populism saying that Europe is not the right solution, that EU must be disbanded, that EU prompts national issues. And we have to withstand certain politicians who, maybe with the aim of cleaning their files, have put the entire judiciary at ease. We have this unfortunate debate on the rule of law in Romania. There are politicians who want something else, to not be held accountable for their deeds. What is the Romanians' fault? They want a European, prosperous country,"* Iohannis argued. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- May 9th, the EU leaders attended the informal summit in Sibiu, in central Romania, have adopted the Sibiu Declaration, a document outlining a commitment to one Europe, *"united through thick and thin."* European Council President Donald Tusk previously proposed such a declaration in his formal invitation extended to the Heads of state and Government attending the Sibiu summit. Declaration reaffirms the idea that *"united, Europe is stronger in this increasingly unsettled and challenging world."* It includes 10 commitments, agreed upon unanimously, that will help member states live up to the responsibility of making the Union *"stronger and our future brighter, while recognizing the European*

perspective of other European states.” The commitments are to defending Europe; to staying united; looking for joint solutions; protecting democracy and rule of law; delivering where it matters most and listening to the concerns and hopes of all Europeans; upholding the principle of fairness, whether in the labor market, welfare, in the economy or in the digital transformation; providing the means for the Union to match its ambitions; safeguarding the future for the next generations of Europeans; protecting the EU citizens; and being a responsible global leader. The results of the discussions during the Sibiu summit will be seen in June when the EU’s Strategic Agenda for the next five years will be adopted at the European Council, Tusk explained. Heads of state and Government of the EU 27 member states attended the Sibiu summit, while British Prime Minister Theresa May did not attend it. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government has been transformed into an “open battle” undermining political stability of the country. Iohannis announced the questions of referendum on justice scheduled for May 26th, 2019 (together with the European elections). Iohannis strongly opposes in Government’s plans to intervene in judicial system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state’s justice. Under these circumstances, it is assessed that political climate will be fully polarized affecting Romania’s political stability. Romania is running the Presidency of the Council of EU facing criticism and non-confidence by the EU

member states’ high officials. The state looks divided in major institutional issues such as national defense, justice, and security. In this context, one should add the direct European Parliament’s warning for activating article 7 of the EU Treaty (suspending certain rights of an EU member state when a country is considered at risk of breaching the EU’s core values). It should be considered that European voices asking for such activation are multiplying. The state faces political abnormality in many levels which at the moment could be resolved only by early parliamentary elections. The Prime Minister’s announcement of transferring Romanian Embassy in Israel from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem harmed the state’s relations with Arab world increasing security risk in the country. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning has become an advanced base close to Russia. Its strategic importance and role has been upgraded and high level NATO exercises take place in its territory. Consequently, Russia reacts mainly against the NATO military base in Deveselu where anti-missile defense systems have been deployed. Temporarily deployment of THAAD system, a modern high-capability system, may raise tension in the region.



SERBIA: May 6th, Democratic Party (Demokratska Stranka – DS) leader Zoran Lutovac announced the formation of an alliance with two other opposition entities. They are the Together for Serbia (Zajedno za Srbiju - ZZS) and the Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska Stranka - SDS), while the alliance will be formed on May 19th, 2019. Lutovac told the daily Danas that the “union” would first function as a single

political subject, in order to later merge into a single Democratic Party that will be made up of these three political organizations. *“But the door of the Democratic Party will be open to others, too, both for the New Party and for associations, movements, other parties and individuals who want to build a better society and state with us,”* said Lutovac. (www.b92.net)

- May 10th, two Russian attack helicopters - Mi-35M and Mi-17V5 - have arrived in Serbia, and presented on Friday in the southern town of Nis during a military parade which marked Victory Day. The helicopters are known as *“flying fortresses”* and *“tank killers”* and are currently at the military airport in Batajnica, just outside Belgrade. According to Sputnik's unofficial information, Serbia has acquired four Mi-35 and three Mi-17 helicopters from Russia that will be delivered by the end of the year. Mi-35s are Russian attack helicopters with transportation as their secondary purpose. In the meanwhile, it has been unofficially announced that new weapons will arrive in Serbia from Russia. Military commentator Miroslav Lazanski - who has recently been appointed as the country's new Ambassador to Russia - assumed that Serbia will receive the Pantsir (surface to air) missile systems. (www.b92.net)

- May 10th, Serbia will behave responsibly, guard peace and stability, but, although we live as if peace will last 100 years, we must be ready to defend ourselves, President Aleksandar Vucic said in Nis, southern Serbia, where he attended the military-police parade *“Defense of Freedom,”* organized to mark WW2 Victory Day. Vucic said that nits of the Army and the Police are increasingly better prepared and equipped, all of

which should serve to deter potential aggressors against Serbia. Vucic pointed out that the defense budget has never been higher, making it easier for a relatively small, independent and sovereign country to lead an independent policy. Following his meetings with Commanders of the Serbian Army (VS), the Interior Ministry (MUP) and the line Ministers, the President expressed gratitude to all MUP and VS members who are tasked with providing security and safety to citizens and who are working hard, and doing probably one of the most difficult jobs in the country. Vucic told reporters that the meeting discussed three important issues, primarily the security situation in the country and the region, and that he informed members of the Army and the Police about the extremely complex political and security situation. *“Serbia will act responsibly and seriously, to preserve peace and stability, but, along with many bad thing that (Yugoslav President) Josip Broz said, he had a good one - to live as if peace would last 100 years, but to be ready to defend the country at any time,”* said Vucic. (www.b92.net)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Serbia has entered in a period of fragile political stability due to citizens' reactions against governmental practices regarding human rights, media freedom, and elections transparency. However, it seems that opposition protest and reactions lose momentum. June 2019 is a possible time for early elections, but it would be determined by developments on Belgrade – Pristina dialogue progress. However, it seems that after the France – Germany initiative for restarting Serbia – Kosovo dialogue there is a

long distance between the two parties so talks could start. Taking into consideration that both sides harden their rhetoric one should not expect any progress in the new meeting in Paris scheduled for July 2019. Serbia strengthens its relations with Russia (and China) seeking stronger support regarding Kosovo case. Security situation is complex and uncertain since Serbia apart from political and diplomatic means has engaged its military and security forces. The Armed Forces are in high readiness alert but Vucic tried to de-escalate situation by stating that war is not a possible solution. However, none could predict Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation included) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. Municipal elections in Kosovo Serb dominated north may provoke a violent outbreak engaging Kosovo Police force and KSF with unprecedented repercussions. At the moment, Serbia looks like acting in accordance with the international law aiming at reducing tension in the region. In other words state's leadership is acting in a "reasonable" and "wise" way avoiding mistakes of the past which have isolated Serbia from the international community. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its armed forces declaring towards all sides that its Armed Forces are the power of the state. It has started an armed race, receiving new weapons mainly from Russia including MIG-29 fighter jets, Attack Helicopters Mi-35 and Mi17, and air defense system Pantsir (not official yet).



SLOVENIA: May 7th, a series of military exercises started in Slovenia engaging country's Armed Forces, troops from 25 NATO member states, and partner countries. Running until June 22nd, 2019 the exercises will get under way with the "IMMEDIATE RESPONSE", a tactical level exercise under the leadership of the US, Slovenian and Croatian Armed Forces. Almost 3,000 troops from Slovenia, Montenegro, Croatia, Italy, Germany, North Macedonia, and Poland will join the exercise. Slovenia will also host "ADRIATIC STRIKE" and "ASTRAL KNIGHT" designed to build more effective and responsive forces to provide security and maintain peace. Exercises will take place in Cerklje ob Krki airbase (107th Airbase), the airstrips of Divaca and Rakican, training fields of Pocek and Posotjna, and Maribor and Ankaran military barracks. (www.sta.si)

- May 9th, with a number of countries within the Schengen zone continues to carry out internal border checks including border checks including neighboring countries such as Austria, the majority of Slovenian parties joining the European Parliament elections claim that such controls are not necessary. Some parties perceive such actions as an expression of lack of trust in Slovenian politics. Slovenian parties generally share the opinion that border controls are unwarranted since crossing borders without control is one of the most tangible benefits of EU membership. The ruling List of Marjan Šarec (Lista Marjana Šarca - LMS) claims that rules on temporary border controls within the Schengen zone should be redefined to prevent abuse of the system. Social Democrats (Socialni Demokrati - SD) believe that border controls are unwarranted

except in extraordinary situations. Any obstacles to free flow of people, goods, services, and capital are unacceptable the party says. The Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratska Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) finds Austria's border checks unacceptable. *"We do not want a future in which countries make unilateral decisions about such fundamental values and treaties such as the Schengen Agreement,"* DeSUS said. The Modern Centre Party (Stranka Modernega Centra - SMC) sees Austria's decision as a violation of EU's fundamental principles arguing that Slovenia protects the Schengen border responsibly. According to the SMC, the main reason for border checks is political situation in Austria. Party of Alenka Bratusek (Stranka Alenke Bratušek - SAB) also sees Austria's border controls as unnecessary *"implementing cheap nationalistic policies."* Opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS) believes that internal border controls are a result of the increasing threat of terrorism and illegal mass migrations. (www.sta.si)

- May 10th, opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS) submitted a motion to oust Defense Minister Karl Erjavec, alleging he abused the army intelligence service, unlawfully dismissed the Army Force Commander Brigadier General Mihe Skerbinec, lied and misled the public. The Prime Minister Marjan Sarec supported his Minister claiming that he is convinced that Erjavec will be able to justify his decisions and actions. Erjavec estimated that the announced interpellation is *"unfounded and without a legal basis."* He is convinced that this is a political act seeking to deteriorate situation of

the Slovenian Armed Forces and to weaken the Government. According to Erjavec, the motion against him will fail because he acted legally. SDS Deputy, Zan Mahnic claimed that Erjavec is responsible for deterioration of defense structures and massive exit of military personnel from service. Moreover, Mahnic said that Erjavec is a pro-Russian politician who leads Slovenia far from NATO following instructions of Russian Ambassador in Ljubljana. After his accusations against the Defense Minister, Mahnic appeared to have been charged with divulging classified information. According to unofficial information there is dissatisfaction for Erjavec in his party, the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratska Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) in which he leads for last 15 years. Although Erjavec controls most of the political bodies in his party, there are some voices for his replacement in DeSUS leadership. (www.vec.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability. Although the Government is a minority one seeking compromise for survival, Sarec has been proved of being flexible in Slovenia's politics so far achieving to balance adequately between different political trends. Left party is the key factor for Government's stability and viability by supporting it in the Parliament. Without the Left's support the Government would be toppled and early elections should be called. At the moment none of the ruling coalition parties wish snap elections. Opposition has filed a motion to oust Defense Minister from office but it is assessed that has little chances to succeed. However, there

are several questions of Erjavec actions and decisions which affect Armed Forces function. The Government has to address several internal social issues (increase of minimum wage, health care, pensions etc). Border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia remains active with low scale skirmishes not be excluded periodically. Tension has been reinforced lately by the revealed wiretapping scandal regarding the arbitration process between Croatia – Slovenia. Engagement of Croatian Intelligence Service operating in another country (Slovenia) is a serious accusation undermining their diplomatic relations. Slovenia implies that such actions may affect its decision regarding Croatia's membership candidacy in Schengen Zone. Slovenia, as it is already known, has filed a lawsuit against Croatia over its refusal to implement the border arbitration. Speaking about Schengen Zone, Slovenian political parties are reacting against Austria's decision to conduct border controls within Schengen borders violating the Treaty. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end.



TURKEY: May 6th, Turkey's top election Board announced that the vote for the Mayor of Istanbul, the country's largest city and

economic hub, will be redone. The new vote will be held on June 23rd, 2019 the Board said in a statement, adding the March 31st, 2019 election was cancelled because of “situations which affected the result and credibility of the polls.” Some ballot box committees were formed illegally by district election board members who will face criminal complaints, the High Election Board said. It also voted to cancel the mandate of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu of the main opposition Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP). Imamoglu was declared as the Mayor of the city on April 17th, 2019 pending the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) last objection to the close results. AKP had lodged an “extraordinary objection” and asked for a rerun of the election after several previous appeals. The party alleged voting irregularities made the results invalid. Erdogan Toprak, an Istanbul CHP MP, told Al Jazeera the Board's decision to redo the Istanbul polls opened the reliability of the Turkish legal and electoral systems up for discussion. “It is a decision that breaks the trust of the Turkish citizens and international community in elections in Turkey,” he said. On the other hand, Markar Esayan, an AKP MP from Istanbul, said the electoral Board made the right decision as his party discovered “organized irregularities” at many ballot boxes in Istanbul. According to the final tally announced by the provincial election board on April 17th, 2019 Imamoglu secured the mayoral seat with 4,169,765 votes, while the AKP's Binali Yildirim received 4,156,036 votes - a difference of 13,729 votes. Istanbul's mayorship has been controlled by the AKP for the last 15 years. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was also

the Mayor of Istanbul between 1994 and 1998. (www.aljazeera.com)

- May 10th, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Turkey will soon clean Syria of terrorists and called on NATO allies to support Ankara in its fight against terror. *“Tens of thousands of guns, vehicles and equipment are provided free-of-cost to terror groups in northern Syria who we are fighting,”* the President said referring to US support to the People's Protection Units (YPG). *“We will soon clean terror-infested regions of Syria and give 4 million Syrians the chance to return home,”* he said. Turkish officials have been signaling a military campaign into the YPG territory east of the Euphrates River if the threat continues. High-level officials in Ankara have also been discussing plans to establish a safe zone in northern Syria free from YPG militants to ensure national security. The YPG has been receiving US backing for fighting DAESH, despite strong objections from Ankara. *“All we want is to see the friendship of those who say they are our friends and the allegiance of those who say they are our allies,”* Erdogan said. The President pointed out the double standards in the fight against terror and the rising extremist movements in the West, stating that the YPG and Kurdistan Workers party (PKK) are tolerated and even *“supported”* across Europe. In regard to Turkey's ongoing bid for membership in the European Union, Erdogan said, *“EU membership has been a strategic foreign policy target for us from the beginning.”* In regard to the Cyprus issue, Erdogan stressed that stability in Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean is only possible by respecting the rights and interests of Turkey and the *“Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus*

[occupied part of Cyprus by Turkish Armed Forces].” Last week, Turkey dispatched its drilling vessel Fatih toward *“its Exclusive Economic Zone”* [within Cypriot EEZ] west of the island of Cyprus to launch drilling second well in the Eastern Mediterranean. The move was met with criticism by the US and EU countries, despite Turkey's assertions that its drilling and seismic survey operations fully abide by international law, having registered its Exclusive Economic Zone with the United Nations. (www.dailysabah.com)

- May 12th, *“Maritime claims of EU member states that violate legitimate rights of third countries cannot be portrayed as EU external borders,”* said Çagatay Erciyes, acting Director General at the Turkish Foreign Ministry. Erciyes described Greek and Greek Cypriots' maritime claims as *“maximalist”* and said they are based on the entitlement of islands to Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf (CS). *“Entitlement Delimitation is not the same thing. Islands may get zero or reduced EEZ/CS if their presence distorts equitable delimitation. This is a fundamental international law principle,”* Erciyes wrote on social media. *“Final maritime boundaries can only be determined through agreements (not violating 3rd parties' possible boundaries) or through litigation. Overlapping maritime claims prevail in the absence of a settlement,”* he added. *“That's indeed the gross violation of international law. Turkey is determined to continue to protect its own Turkish Cypriots' CS/EEZ rights,”* he added. (www.yenisafak.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

Deterioration of Turkish – US relations is a major concern for Turkey threatening its political and economic stability. Purchase of Russian air-defense system S-400 is unacceptable for the US administration threatening directly Turkey with sanctions. Taking into consideration that Turkey is a pivotal country enjoying geopolitical importance and having one of the largest militaries (the 2nd within NATO) it is hard to believe that the US seek a full rift with its NATO ally. On the contrary, there are still open official and unofficial channels of communication working on a mutual accepted compromise. The U.S needs Turkey and the opposite. Economic recession does not help the Turkish President to strengthen his position internally undermining his political power. Turkey is heading in a major economic crisis. It seems that economy is the major Turkish problem which may be emerged as the “Achilles’ heel” for Erdogan and his political long reign. It cannot be excluded dramatic developments regarding Turkish economy. Besides, Turkish society looks like being fed up with autocratic practices of Erdogan and this was a key point during last local elections. Revote of municipal elections in Istanbul raises questions for the whole process and transparency of procedure. Free and fair elections are under question in Turkey taking into consideration that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and ruling AKP fully controls Justice system and state’s institutions. Scheduled for June 23rd, 2019 elections in Istanbul will be a “stress test” for Turkish democratic principles and values. However, it is proved that loss of Istanbul municipality – the biggest Turkish city and trade hub which was under AKP control last 15 years – was a “bitter defeat” for Erdogan. Turkey faces

several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. Although Turkey maintains its strategic goal of entering the EU, the EU sends strong messages of suspending the EU – Turkey accession talks. Turkish Armed Forces declares its readiness to intervene militarily in Syria, eastern of Euphrates river but the US does not give the “green light” aiming at protecting Syrian Kurds and YPG. Turkey is reinforcing its troops in the Turkish – Syrian borders waiting for the “green light” for establishing a safe zone in Syria but it is doubtful if it will ever get it. There are thoughts of unilateral action within Syria but such a decision may bring Turkish troops against the U.S forces; an unprecedented scenario. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. In Eastern Mediterranean Turkey reacted eventually by sending its drillship Fatih (accompanied by three other ships) to show its presence and to claim its interests. It was an expected reaction and it is assessed that Turkey entered in the East Mediterranean geostrategic and energy rivalry showing determination by action. The cost so far, for Turkey, is zero

achieving simultaneously to question Cypriot sovereign rights. International reactions (US, EU etc) has limited in a couple of “warm words of support and sympathy” to Cyprus leaving initiative of action to Turkey. It is assessed that Turkey is fully determined to escalate tension in the region including armed violence aiming at securing its interests. Taking into consideration that Cyprus and Greece act in coordination and the latter guarantees defense and security of Cyprus it cannot be excluded an accidental or pre-planned “hot incident” in Cyprus or the Aegean Sea.

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NOTE

-  Stable situation. No security risk
-  Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored
-  Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions
-  Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk
-  Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict