



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE

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ALBANIA: April 13th, Albania remains a “main source” of cannabis imports to the EU according to the Europol 2021 SOCTA report on organized crime. (www.exit.al)

- April 14th, Albania’s Prime Minister Edi Rama implied that his party is open for a grand coalition with the main opposition party, Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD), but its leader refused the offer. (www.exit.al)

- April 16th, the Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Prosecution has called in for questioning the two owners and editors of Lapsi.al following the recent leak of highly sensitive personal data belonging to more than 910,000 Albanians and they provided to the Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS) for use in their campaign. (www.exit.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Pre-electoral campaign in Albania has tarnished by allegations of vote buying and use of state institutions for party’s interests. Leak of personal data of 910,000 people used by the ruling Socialist party has forced the Prosecution to start an investigate. Albania is considered by a lot of experts as a “captured state” namely the Government has established a mechanism which puts public affairs in the service of specific interests of state’s top officials. The Prime Minister, Edi Rama has called the opposition leader Lulzim Basha to cooperate after the elections in a wider coalition but Basha rejected the proposal. International community asks from Rama and his Government to conduct free and

fair elections bringing Albania back to stability. Besides, these elections would be a strong test for the opening of the first intergovernmental conference between Albania and EU. The country suffers from corruption, money laundering and links between politicians, businessmen and organized crime. Needless to say that Albania has been evolved into a European hub of drug smuggling and human trafficking. In the geopolitical field, Albania has developed very close relations with Turkey. Albanian economic dependence from Turkey is steadily increased. In short, Turkey exercises significant influence in Albania through direct investments, donations, military cooperation and cultural projects.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

April 13th, the Mayor of Srebrenica, Mladen Grujicic, the representative of the local center-right Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD), Radomir Pavlovic, and the councilors of the “My Address is Srebrenica” initiative signed a coalition agreement on the formation of a local Government in Srebrenica Tuesday, Fena news agency reported. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- April 14th, member of Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Milorad Dodik, told at yesterday’s extraordinary press conference that he rejects the possibility of war, but that he will work on the peaceful separation of the state of BiH. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- April 16th, the Slovenian portal “Uncensored” published a “non-paper” that talks about the ideas for the dissolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the accession of the Republika Srpska (RS)

to Serbia, and the unification of Kosovo with Albania. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bosnia was involved last week in a non-paper case which according to media reports advocates the redraw of Balkan borders and more specifically the dissolution of the country with its current structure. Although it is not still clear if the Slovenian Prime Minister, Janez Jansa has issued this non-paper, there were strong political reactions from Bosnian political forces. The (alleged) non-paper proposes unification of Republika Srpska to Serbia, Kosovo to Albania and a special autonomous status for Croatian territories in Bosnia. Bosniak (Muslim Bosnians) politicians rejected such ideas as dangerous for regional peace and stability. On the other hand, leader of Bosnian Serbs, Milorad Dodik stated – as usual – that he is in favor of Republika Srpska’s peaceful secession. Such “leaks” strengthen nationalistic rhetoric in Bosnia which is vulnerable in ethnic division and hatred. Potential redraw of borders in the Balkans is awakening memories of the 1992 – 1995 Yugoslav war. There is no doubt that the Dayton Peace Agreement terminated the bloodshed, but it is time to be reviewed towards a more functional decision-making system and a more functional state. Bosnia has become a field of rivalry between the US (and EU) and Russia. Taking into consideration that Bosnia is not an EU and NATO member state, one could understand the reason that Bosnia has been targeted by Moscow. In other words there is fertile soil for influence activity towards the country. Experts do not exclude attempts of destabilization of the country by the Russian factor. Under current situation the

US may push Bosnia for rapid progress regarding the country’s NATO accession. Croatia and Serbia continue to treat Bosnia as their protectorate interfering in its internal affairs. Bosnia is far from joining the EU since the country suffers from corruption, absence of rule of law, difficulties in respect of human rights, weak public administration, democratic deficit and its economic performance is one of the lowest in Europe.



BULGARIA: April 15th, Iva Miteva-Rupcheva is the new Parliament Speaker. She is an MP of the political group There Is Such a People (Ima Takav Narod - ITN). (www.novinite.com)

- April 15th, President Rumen Radev addressed the National Assembly after the new lawmakers took the oath of office. He announced that on April 19th, 2021 he would start consultations with parliamentary groups to form a Government. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Bulgarian Parliament was formed into a body following the parliamentary elections of April 4th, 2021. The elections’ surprise “There is Such a People” elected the Parliament’s Speaker (Iva Miteva). The GERB Government has been dissolved and consultations will start for the establishment of the new Government. Bulgaria is facing uncertainty since it is rather difficult to see a viable coalition Government. GERB, BSP and DPS have little possibilities to join a ruling coalition. It is very likely to see an experts Government or a caretaker one. In short, Bulgaria is marching with one or another way

towards new elections. Besides, the time is running in favor of the newly emerged political powers which are very likely to see their power to be increased in a new electoral race. Bulgaria – North Macedonia relations remain tense due to Sofia's decision to block Skopje progress of accession negotiations. Current political instability could affect a resolution of the dispute between the two countries in short term. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). Military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force.



CROATIA: April 13th, “The issue of missing people must be resolved before Serbia joins the EU. We know that our neighbors know, and must know, much more about the missing than they are currently divulging. This is a human issue, a symbolic issue and a national issue,” the Croatian President, Zoran Milanovic said in a meeting with representatives from veterans’ associations at his Office in Zagreb. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- April 16th, at today’s Government cabinet session Ministers adopted a decision to call local elections, which should take place on May 16th, 2021. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- April 15th, “No one in the European Union advocates the disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina and everyone, including Croatia, wants to help the country’s integration into the Union as soon as possible,” Croatia’s Foreign Minister, Gordan Grlic-Radman, said in Sarajevo. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Croatian Government is strong and stable. Coming local elections scheduled for May 16th, 2021 could be a test for political forces but it is expected the ruling HDZ to confirm its power. The state’s president, Zoran Milanovic stated that Serbia should resolve the issue of missing Croats before entering the EU, unveiling that Zagreb is ready to put obstacles in Belgrade’s effort to enter the EU. Croatia rejected any ideas for Bosnia’s dissolution confirming that it remains committed in current borders in the region. However, the country continues to interfere in Bosnian affairs seeking to promote its national interests. Main Croatian task is to achieve the amendment of Bosnian electoral law securing the equal election of Bosnian Croats in state’s institutions. Accession in the Schengen Zone and Eurozone is a strategic goal since it will benefit the state regarding economy, trade, and security. Illegal migration in borders with Bosnia remains a major problem for the country, despite the significant reduce of migrants last two months. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces’ modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: April 15th, SAIPEM and HYPERION SYSTEMS ENGINEERING have joined forces to create SAIPEM -HYPERION EASTMED ENGINEERING Ltd, a jointly controlled company based in Nicosia. Gradually the new joint venture will take over servicing clients from both companies in the region. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- April 16th, for the fifth year in a row, the Air Force of the National Guard is taking part in the

multinational military exercise “*INIOHOS*” which takes place every year in Greece. The Cyprus Air Force will take part with an AW-139 helicopter. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- April 16th, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened Turkish Cypriots with repercussions after a “*court*” in the occupied north of the island terminated the teaching of the Quran in schools. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- April 16th, two separate states and sovereign equality have no place in a Cyprus settlement, President Nicos Anastasiades said on Friday in response to Turkey’s views on the issue, which were reiterated by Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Thursday. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- April 16th, the first joint meeting between Cyprus, Greece, Israel and the United Arab Emirates, which started on Friday in Paphos, signifies a new era for the Mediterranean, Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides said. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- April 18th, Cyprus has seen its public debt increase sharply in 2020, and even more in 2021, but the plan to service the debt is working. According to a report by the Public Debt Management Office released on Friday, the public debt reached 24.8 billion Euros, 118% of GDP at the time. Currently, it is at 36 billion Euros, or 124% of GDP. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

One week prior the 5+1 informal meeting on the Cypriot question scheduled for April 27th – 29th, 2021 there are clear signs that talks are doomed to failure before even starts. While Cyprus advocates the solution of a bicomunal – bizonal

federation with decentralized competencies for the federal parts, the Turkish Cypriot community supports the idea of two independent and sovereign states. Turkey appears totally uncompromising to discuss the idea of a federal resolution limiting the possibilities of a positive result in the coming meeting. It should be noted that Ankara is behaving like the Turkish Cypriot community is its protectorate interfering in its internal affairs. Cyprus is strengthening its relations with regional states following a foreign policy of multilateral cooperation in several fields. Stagnation is recorded in the energy field since international energy giants such as EXXONMOBIL, ENI and TOTAL have canceled their activity in the Cypriot waters. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize). As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: April 12th, Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias promised that Greece “*is back*” in Libya during his official visit to the North African country on Monday. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 14th, officials of France’s Naval Group presented at the French Embassy in Athens the company’s proposal to supply frigates to the Hellenic Navy. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 14th, Greece and Libya have agreed to hold talks on marking out their maritime zones in the Mediterranean, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said after a meeting with the President

of the Libyan Presidential Council, Mohamed al-Menfi. (www.reuters.com)

- April 15th, at least 1,100 refugees left the island of Lesbos in the eastern Aegean in the period between March 23rd and April 13th, the Migration Ministry said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 15th, the Foreign Ministers of Turkey and Greece clashed openly at a joint news conference in Ankara that began with hopes of improved relations but quickly descended into acrimonious accusations from both sides. (www.reuters.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

Greece has strengthened its diplomatic efforts towards Libya seeking to take into advantage the ceasefire in the country and the establishment of the new interim Government. The new political reality in Libya creates certain conditions for Greece to approach the new Libyan authority seeking to limit the Turkish influence. The ultimate goal for Athens is to persuade Libya to cancel the agreement with Turkey on maritime zones; a rather difficult goal since there are certain signs that both, Libya and Turkey are ready to honor the agreement. On the Greek – Turkish front is in progress an effort by both countries to discuss bilateral disputes seeking to de-escalate tension and to explore ways of peaceful resolution. These exploratory talks follow a period of tension between the two countries with deployment of their Armed Forces in the Aegean Sea. Surprisingly, the Greek Foreign Minister, Nikos Dendias used harsh words against Turkish provocations in a press conference with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu following a visit in Turkey. Dendias did not hesitate to speak loudly and openly for

Turkish violation of Greek airspace and territorial waters and threatened Ankara with EU sanctions. Dendias stance in his visit in Turkey has excited Greek citizens (and voters) who ask for a more comprehensive policy towards the neighboring country. However, it is not certain if Dendias' stance in the press conference was the same during the confidential talks with Cavusoglu and the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Following the conclusions of the last summer crisis between Athens and Ankara in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean Sea Greece implements an ambitious project for strengthening the Armed Forces seeking to modernize the Navy and Air Force power by purchasing new frigates and fighter jets. The country needs not only to maintain balance of power in the region, but to achieve air and naval superiority for protecting the Greek vital interests. Apart from military armaments, Greece is promoting strong defense cooperation with several regional countries aiming to strengthen its external balance as a tool of deterrence of Turkish provocative actions. The country enjoys political stability and the Government enjoys acceptance among citizens.



KOSOVO: April 13th, the start of the UN Security Council's online session about Kosovo's situation was marked by Russia's demand that Pristina's representative removed the flag, adding eight UNSC members did not recognize Kosovo as a state but a territory. (www.n1.info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

Kosovo has a new Government and a new President, while Vetevendosje is the absolute

dominant in internal politics. It is now expected the Prime Minister, Albin Kurti to unveil his domestic and foreign policy. Kurti is strongly involved in Albanian politics by establishing a Vetevendosje branch in Albania which runs in the coming elections seeking to enter the Parliament. Taking into consideration the close relations between Albania and Kosovo, Kurti's move could become politically dangerous. Progress of dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina is uncertain, since Kurti advocates that it is not his priority. However, it is expected much pressure by the US and EU to join talks with tangible results. Organized crime, corruption, money laundering, weak public administration, absence of rule of law, controlled justice, transactions between politicians and criminals are persistent "open sores" for Kosovo.



MOLDOVA: April 15th, the Constitutional Court ruled that there are circumstances that justify the dissolution of Parliament. (www.ipn.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Constitutional Court's decision that the President meets the necessary criteria to dissolve the Parliament creates a new political scenery in the country. The President, Maia Sandu is closer than ever to achieve its main strategic task; the dissolution of the Parliament and call of snap elections. However, the former President and leader of PSRM, Igor Dodon has not said yet his final word. It should be taken into consideration that the Parliament enjoys more competencies and powers than the state's presidency. Parliamentary majority can be maneuvered to achieve its political goals. Besides the country is

in state of emergency due to COVID-19 pandemic and current situation the Parliament cannot be dissolved. Political deadlock has not ended yet, despite Sandu's temporary judicial victory. The country remains vulnerable and unstable amid a health crisis and a seriously damaged economy. The west namely the EU, US and NATO strongly support political change in the country favoring the pro-western PAS as the leading force, while Russia is seeking to maintain current political balance (PSRM) which favors its political plans. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: April 13th, the Montenegrin President, Milo Djukanovic accused Serbia of spreading nationalism which, according to him, had a malignant effect on his country. (www.n1info.com)

- April 14th, Montenegro's Justice Minister Vladimir Leposavic was wrong to question the Srebrenica genocide and he should have been more sensitive about the issue, Deputy Prime Minister of Montenegro Dritan Abazovic told N1's Vojislav Stevanovic adding there was no split among the ruling coalition. (www.n1info.com)

- April 15th, the EC said that Montenegro had recently officially asked the European institutions to help it repay the loan it took from China in 2014 to build a motorway. (www.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Certain internal and external stakeholders work on destabilizing the Government. Pro-opposition

media leak that there is a dispute in the ruling coalition which could lead in toppling the Government. It is a fact that the Justice Minister Vladimir Leposavic's statements, in which he questioned the Srebrenica genocide, have put the ruling coalition in a difficult situation, but it is assessed that the Government remains coherent and stable. Montenegro's one billion debt to China has strong geopolitical and geoeconomic aspects which could force the Government to adopt certain policies. The loan has been taken by the 2014 Government of Milo Djukanovic over a controversial highway project and the current Government – which is consisted of parties which opposed in the highway construction – is seeking to resolve the problem of repaying the loan. The Government has officially asked the EU to help Montenegro with the debt but Brussels are reluctant on assisting the small Balkan country. Montenegro is endangered to come under the Chinese influence which is growing in Southeastern Europe. Taking into consideration that Podgorica is seeking to join the EU, the latter may find a solution of refinancing the Montenegrin loan aiming to reduce China's influence in Montenegro. Turbulence and political provocation against the Government motivated by foreign circles aiming to topple the ruling coalition could not be excluded. The EU and US consider the Montenegrin ruling coalition as pro-Russian setting a threat for the Southeastern Europe political and security stability. Montenegro needs concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Montenegro is closer to the EU accession than any other

Western Balkan country but current political situation puts at risk its European future.



NORTH MACEDONIA: April 12th, the European Commission avoided commenting on the passports forgery case which was revealed in North Macedonia but it highlighted that it monitors the implementation of all visa liberalization requirements. (www.mia.mk)

- April 16th, redrawing of borders in the Balkans will not contribute to stabilization of the region and such idea will not be met by support in the EU, President Stevo Pendarovski said commenting on the alleged non-paper sent by the Slovenian Prime Minister, Janez Jansa to the EU and EU member states. (www.mia.mk)

- April 18th, with 115 votes in favor, the Parliament of North Macedonia unanimously approved the fifth package of anti-crisis measures to help citizens and companies affected by COVID-19. (www.republika.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bulgarian blockade of the North Macedonia's accession to the EU has overturned the ruling coalition foreign policy. Current deadlock affects the Zoran Zaev's Government stability and it is assessed that Bulgaria is not really willing to step back from its claims. Skopje are obliged to compromise with Sofia if it really seeks to accelerate its accession to the EU. Corruption is reign in the country and the current case with North Macedonia's false passports which have been given to criminals and disputed people confirms that there is a significant "gap" which

could put a threat not only in state's security but also in other neighboring or European states. Brussels has already warned Skopje that visa liberalization mechanism might be suspended if the latter does not fulfill all the necessary requirements. The Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev enjoys a fragile majority in the Parliament and his cabinet is rather unstable and vulnerable to political blackmail. Adoption of the fifth package of anti-crisis measures was a result of several backstage talks, agreements and political transactions. Political crisis could break out at any time in the country.



ROMANIA: April 14th, Romania's Liberal Prime Minister Florin Citu announced that he forwarded President Klaus Iohannis the request to dismiss Health Minister Vlad Voiculescu, a member of the junior coalition partner Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR) - Party of Liberty, Unity and Solidarity (Partidul Libertate, Unitate și Solidaritate - PLUS). Deputy Prime Minister Dan Barna, co-president of USR-PLUS, will manage the Health Ministry as interim Minister until his party comes up with a new proposal for this seat. (www.romania-insider.com)

- April 14th, the Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR) - Party of Liberty, Unity and Solidarity (Partidul Libertate, Unitate și Solidaritate - PLUS) alliance, the second-biggest party of the three that make the center-right ruling coalition in Romania, announced it no longer supports Liberal Prime Minister Florin Citu after he decided to dismiss Health Minister Vlad Voiculescu, a member of USR-PLUS. (www.romania-insider.com)

- April 15th, the Prime Minister Florin Citu said that the presence of Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR) - Party of Liberty, Unity and Solidarity (Partidul Libertate, Unitate și Solidaritate - PLUS) Ministers at the Government meeting was an "important" step in unblocking the political situation in Romania. (www.nineoclock.ro)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Romania has faced last week a serious political crisis which threatened stability of the ruling coalition. The Prime Minister's decision to dismiss the Health Minister, Vlad Voiculescu from his duties has triggered a major conflict within the ruling coalition. USR-PLUS threatened to withdraw its confidence from Florin Citu as the Prime Minister. However, they did not fulfill its threat due to parties' interests. Actually, PNL appeared more cohesive regarding its stance and support towards Citu, while USR was reluctant to proceed with no confidence towards the Prime Minister. It could be said that PNL exits the crisis strengthened but it seems that the ruling coalition is fragile and vulnerable to internal parties' interests. Currently, the scenario of the Government's collapse is not likely because PNL and the USR-PLUS coalition have more to lose than to gain by a potential cabinet collapse. Romania enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO. After redeployment of the US military forces from Germany, Romania is upgrading into the advanced bastion of NATO against Russia.

Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries and the Alliance perceiving it as a threat against its national security.



SERBIA: April 12th, Russia's Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Botsan Harchenko said that the two country's strategic partnership has "cosmic prospects." (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 14th, Serbian Foreign Minister Nikola Selakovic told an online UN Security Council meeting that Albanian extremism is on the rise in Kosovo, a Government press release said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 14th, Russian Fund for Direct Investments (RDIF) said that it started the production of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine with Serbia's "Torlak" Institute. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 15th, Serbian Parliament Speaker Ivica Dacic said that only some opposition parties handed in their platforms for the inter-party dialogue with the authorities. Dacic said that European Parliament officials will hold online consultations with all Serbian parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties between April 19th and 22nd on the second stage of the dialogue and could come to Belgrade on May 7th for talks before the dialogue opens in June. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Mistrust reins in the inter-party dialogue between the ruling coalition and the non-parliamentary opposition. The Parliament Speaker, Ivica Dacic who is in charge for this process is obviously downgrading its dynamic seeking to devalue

dialogue. Opposition appears divided and confused failing to present a comprehensive political proposal for tangible changes and the ruling coalition is taking advantage of that. Besides, the ruling coalition is seeking to terminate the EU's mediation in the process claiming that it has concluded its role. Opposition plans protests if dialogue fails aiming to destabilize the ruling coalition. The Serbian process towards the EU has stuck due to political reasons and this brings Belgrade closer to Moscow and Beijing. Serbia is the closest and most loyal partner of Russia in Southeast Europe. Despite the EU and US calls, the Belgrade – Prishtina dialogue has stopped. Serbian authorities wait to see and decode the intention of the new Kosovo Government. Corruption, organized crime, public administration accountability, media freedom are the main internal challenges for the country. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.



SLOVENIA: April 14th, the Foreign Minister Anze Logar told the Foreign Policy Committee that Slovenia's strategy on the Western Balkans had not changed as he responded to a question about an alleged non paper on the Western Balkans that Prime Minister Janez Jansa was supposed to have sent to Brussels. He said recent developments in relations between Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina benefited no one and said summoning the Slovenian Ambassador in Sarajevo over a single article published by the media in Bosnia-

Herzegovina was a “*diplomatic faux pas*.” (www.sta.si)

- April 15th, the Constitutional Court has cleared an act securing 780 million Euros in investments in the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) until 2026 as well as Parliament’s decision not to allow a referendum on the act sought by the center-left opposition. Defense Minister Matej Tonin welcomed the Court’s decision as being in the interest of the state. (www.sta.si)

- April 15th, the Government adopted changes to the act on service in the Slovenian Armed Forces, aiming to address long-standing issues pertaining to labor regulations. The changes are expected to cost an additional 6 million Euros annually. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The minority Government of Janez Jansa enjoys fragile stability. Slovenia was in the middle of a regional politics “typhoon” last week due to an alleged non-paper sent by the Slovenian Prime Minister, Janez Jansa advocating for border change in Western Balkans. Although Jansa rejected the existence of such a paper, the news have provoked several reactions not only in Balkan countries, but also in the international community. It is not still clear if there was a written proposal by Jansa for border changing in Western Balkans including Bosnia dissolution. However, such leaks could threaten peace and stability in the region and certainly they put obstacles in the relations between the countries. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. Their operational readiness is under question and it is assessed that they cannot

accomplish their mission. Currently, Slovenia has joined several military projects seeking to modernize its Armed Forces.



TURKEY: April 12th, the Head of Libya’s new interim Government, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have affirmed their commitment to a controversial 2019 maritime agreement that has angered Greece and Cyprus. Dbeibah paid an official visit to Ankara where Erdogan pledged to support Libya’s unity, its reconstruction and its military. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 12th, Canada has cancelled export permits to Turkey for drone technology, the Foreign Affairs Department announced, after a Government review found that Canadian-made systems had been used by Azerbaijan in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu had urged Canada to review the defense industry restrictions. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 13th, Turkey will host a peace summit for Afghanistan from April 24th to May 4th, 2021 meant to jump-start efforts to end the war and sketch out a possible political settlement, Turkish authorities said. Turkey’s Foreign Ministry said the Afghan Government and the Taliban would attend the 10 day summit, but the Taliban later said it will not attend any summits on Afghanistan’s future until all foreign forces leave the country. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 14th, Turkey’s Foreign Minister has said a new period was beginning with Egypt as Ankara pushes ahead with normalizing relations with Cairo, local media reported. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 14th, the plan to construct a 40 kilometer waterway skirting the north of Istanbul to connect the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea has been given the go-ahead, with work scheduled to begin this summer, in mid-2021. According to Government estimates, the project will complete in seven years with a price tag ranging from 9.3 to 14.6 billion dollars. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 15th, the Foreign Ministers of Greece and Turkey have exchanged accusations on a wide range of issues during a volatile press conference at the end of their first meeting in over a year. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 16th, Turkey called on Israel to cease its aggressive policies against Palestinians. A statement by the Foreign Ministry said that such policies damage peace and stability in the region, adding “It is worrying that Israel’s policies of oppression and violence against the Palestinians escalated during Ramadan.” (www.aa.com.tr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey is working on reestablishing its external relations with Europe, Middle East and North Africa countries. Approach with Egypt continues as a Turkish strategic goal aiming to reduce the influence of the close Cyprus - Greece – Egypt relation in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Taking for grant the stable relation between Libya and Turkey, if the latter achieves to restore its relations with Cairo, it would achieve a strategic victory against Greece and Cyprus. However, the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan insists on a hostile policy towards Israel seeking to allure the Muslim world making Turkey its leader. Talks with Greece continue in an effort of mutual de-escalation of tension between the two countries.

Although both Athens and Ankara agree that dialogue could work effectively, exploratory talks so far do not bring tangible results. Greek Foreign Minister, Nikos Dendias visit to Turkey confirmed that there is a significant distance between the two countries for finding common ground. However, Turkey has achieved to restart its relations with the EU. Despite Ankara’s turn to politics, it maintains military forces in several fronts. It should be underlined that despite the Ankara – Washington deteriorating relations, US top officials keep on praising the role of Turkey in the western security architecture. Erdogan’s ambitious plan to build a new canal in the north of Istanbul connecting the Marmara Sea with the Black Sea could become not only a source of geopolitical tension in the near future, but also could trigger the Turkish economy’s collapse. Turkish authorities continue to violate human rights, media freedom and democratic rule. Arrests of political opponents, journalists who criticize the ruling AKP and political activists is a common practice. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Turkey could not be considered as a democracy but rather as a “hybrid democracy” since the President adopts authoritarian practices.


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NOTE

■ Stable situation. No security risk.

 *Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.*

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

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

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