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**Hermes Institute of  
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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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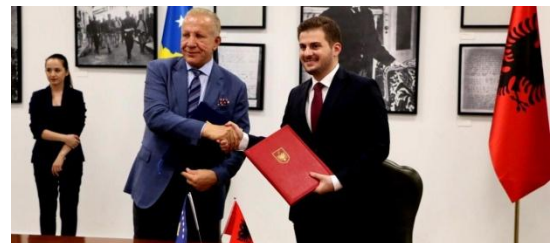


**ALBANIA:** July 2<sup>nd</sup>, the President of Albania, Ilir Meta, has proposed early central and presidential elections to resolve the political crisis in Albania, on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019 when he decreed the new date for the local elections. Meta said that he would run for President, while Prime Minister Edi Rama, and the Socialist MPs who do not want him, will be free to appoint their own candidate. For Meta, this is how this crisis can be resolved. The President underlined that he has not asked Rama to resign from his post, but he tried to resolve the crisis because the EU accession negotiations will never open without the opposition participating in the elections. He underlined that the proposition for early elections is his own choice. If Rama has another proposition, Meta says he is welcome to make it public. *“I am not interested in the winner, whether it is Basha or Rama. I just do not want Albania to lose, because of some games made by politicians and embassies,”* Meta said. (www.top-channel.tv)

- July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) leader, Lulzim Basha, declared that his party will not recognize any result coming from the June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 elections. He also responded to the US Deputy Assistant Secretary, Matthew Palmer, who asked the opposition to wait for the establishing of the Constitutional Court to file a complaint against the process. *“This idea, of letting Rama take over the local Government illegally and against the Constitution, so that we can wait for the creation of the Constitutional Court a few months later, goes against the basic principles of democracy. The opposition does not recognize the June*

*30<sup>th</sup> elections, because it violates the rule of law and cannot produce any political representation,”* Basha declared. PD leader responded to the appeal of the EU diplomat, Luigi Soreca, who said that both parties should urgently sit and dialogue. *“Punishment of politicians, who have stolen elections in cooperation with crime, is not something that can be discussed or negotiated in political dialogue. The only path is that of the rule of law, which means punishing all politicians who have stolen the elections and cooperated with crime,”* Basha said. (www.top-channel.tv)

- July 3<sup>rd</sup>, Kosovo and Albania have signed an agreement on unifying and coordinating their foreign policy, which will include joint Embassies. Kosovo Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli visited his counterpart Gent Cakaj in Albania where they signed the agreement.



Albanian Foreign Minister Gent Cakaj with his Kosovo counterpart Behgjet Pacolli

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

The two states agreed to closely coordinate foreign policy, create joint diplomatic missions and share staff and experience for the implementation of their own national interests, Pacolli wrote on social media. *“This is a big step ahead to come together in front of the world and act as a [single] nation,”* he continued, referring to the fact that both Balkan countries are mainly ethnic Albanian. Cakaj said he felt honored to

conclude such an agreement. “It opens new horizons for joint institutional action as we move ever closer towards deep national integration,” Cakaj wrote on Social media. Nezir Kraki, analyst and professor of European Policies at University of Paris-Est Créteil, UPEC, told Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) noted that foreign policy of Albania “is not at all in line with that of Kosovo. Kosovo has other concerns. Albania should not be tied to Kosovo but continue on its path,” he added. For now, he believes, it is enough for each state not to be an obstacle to the other. Kosovo President Hashim Thaci started last month a new discourse about Kosovo joining Albania, after his former call for “border corrections” between Kosovo Serbia got nowhere. On Monday, commemorating a battle between Serbian forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in Pashtrik, Thaci went further, asking the Kosovo and Albania Parliaments to take action. “New circumstances have been created, and the best solution would be that two Parliaments, of Kosovo and Albania, approve the statements of the people’s wish to live in a single state,” he said. However, Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, one of the strongest opponents of the border correction policy, has said he is not convinced about the prospect of instant unification with Albania. “This is a century-long project but, in this phase, I think the most important thing is to deepen cooperation between Kosovo and Albania and remove bureaucratic and administrative hurdles,” Haradinaj told journalists last week. (www.balkaninsight.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Local elections held on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 are rejected by the opposition maintaining a tense situation. President Ilir Meta proposed presidential and local elections on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in an effort to resolve current political crisis. It is a fact that local election turnout (21.6% according to the Central Election Committee) raises questions about its legitimacy. Another important issue demonstrates that the state lacks normality is that currently there is no active Constitutional Court which could give decide on elections legitimacy. The country has entered in an endless crisis undermining its democratic function according to the European values and standards. Rama’s efforts to dismiss the President, Ilir Meta are ongoing. In other words, Albania is under a political and constitutional chaos. Questions for a potential civil conflict have been raised showing that situation is totally disappointing. Such situation strongly affected Albania’s EU perspective. Combination of political instability, ties between politics and organized crime, and corruption made the EU to postpone the opening of accession negotiations for Albania for the near future. According to the Enlargement Commissioner, situation will be re-examined by October 2019. Rama’s Government collapse and snap elections is a possible scenario. 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. 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. Albania – Kosovo agreement on unifying and coordinating their foreign policy strongly demonstrates such stance. However, Kosovo rhetoric for “a single nation” raises the question of “pan-albanism” which definitely is a threat for peace and stability in Southeastern Europe.*



## **BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:**

July 2<sup>nd</sup>, Bosnia's incumbent Prime Minister Denis Zvizdic said he would not vote for the formation of the new state-level Government before the legal condition for the submission of Bosnia's Annual National Programme (ANP) to Brussels are met. *“My takeover of the function of the Speaker of Bosnia's House of Representatives will not be the moment when the Government is formed. It will be formed the moment all the political actors say they will respect the rule of law. From the moment they decide to respect that, we will have the new Government in 10-15 days at most,”* the incumbent Chairman of the Council of Ministers (CoM) which serves as Bosnia's Government, said after the CoM session, adding that the new CoM will not be formed before the ANP is sent to the NATO headquarters. ANP is a precondition for the activation of Bosnia's Membership Action Plan (MAP) for NATO after

the Alliance approved its activation for the country. But, even though Bosnia adopted a number of laws and regulations saying it would fulfil all the preconditions for the MAP, Bosnian Serbs stand against it. When it comes to Bosnia's NATO membership, its three largest ethnic groups stand divided on the issue. Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks support the country's accession, while Bosnian Serbs are strictly against it, saying they will follow Serbia's lead on this. The Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (RS) entity's National Assembly even adopted a Declaration stipulating the entity will remain militarily neutral and it will not join any military alliance. After the October 2018 general election, the CoM Chairman suggested by the strongest Serb party in the country, Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata or – SNSD), Zoran Tegeltija, said he would not work on Bosnia's NATO accession, nor would he push for the adoption of the country's ANP. This sparked outrage among Bosnian politicians who said they would not support Tegeltija's election before he includes NATO into his work program. ([www.ba.n1info.com](http://www.ba.n1info.com))

- July 5<sup>th</sup>, controversy has erupted in Bosnia over a Government proposal to deploy military units to the borders with Serbia and Montenegro, in order to physically block migrants from illegally crossing and entering the country. The Bosnian Government has asked the Defense Ministry to prepare and send the President's office a measure that would allow the country to deploy military units at the borders with Serbia and Montenegro in order to physically impede migrants and refugees from illegally crossing into the country, according to reports in the local media. Prime

Minister Denis Zvizdic, a Bosnian Muslim, said the border crossings are precisely defined and about ten are heavily used. At the same time as presenting the proposal, he announced the entry of 100 to 150 new cadets into the ranks of the border Police, as well as the reinforced border control in collaboration with the Police forces of Serbia and Montenegro. The current rotating President of the tripartite Bosnian Presidency, Milorad Dodik, a Bosnian Serb immediately argued against the proposal. *“It is understood that the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces is the President,”* Dodik said adding *“And I, as President, will not permit the borders to be closed,”* he stated. Dodik said Zvizdic should find a solution to the migrant problem through dialogue with Serbia and Montenegro, and not just send the army to the border. The Bosnian Serb leader has repeatedly said he will not allow the closure of the borders, emphasizing at the same time that no migrant will be received in to the Republika Srpska (RS). In recent months, with an uptick in the number of migrants journeying along the Balkan route, the number of migrant arrivals in Bosnia-Herzegovina has grown considerably too. Most refugees are concentrated in the towns of Bihac and Velika Kladusa, in the country’s far northwest at the border with Croatia. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- July 5<sup>th</sup>, the Bosnian Minister for Human Rights and Refugees Semih Borovac said families of former Islamic State (ISIS) fighters in Syria might be accommodated near the southwest city of Mostar at the Selakovac reception centre. *“If they have no other place to stay, they may be placed in this centre. Salakovac is a possible option,”* she told the media. Bosnia has verified the data of 91

men, women and children from Bosnia currently still in Syria following the collapse of ISIS caliphate and who wish to go home. Authorities will continue working on these 91 cases, and on other Bosnian citizens held in camps across Syria, the Security Ministry told N1 media outlet on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The sensitive issue of the return of ISIS fighters and recruits from Syria will be dealt with by a special coordination body acting under the Foreign Ministry. In April, a 24 year old Bosnian was sent back to from Syria, as Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) reported, and charged with organizing terrorist acts among other crimes. So far, Bosnian Courts have sentenced 23 people under second-instance verdicts to a total of 42 years and eight months in prison in 14 different cases, for traveling to Syria to fight or for recruiting others to fight. Another trial is ongoing and the beginning of a trial in a further case is awaited. Dragan Mekic, Bosnian Security Minister, insisted that anyone returned from Syria will be properly checked. *“We cannot refuse our citizens the right to come back, but all those who we accept will be processed,”* Mekic told BIRN earlier this year. (www.balkaninsight.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*Political instability and uncertainty continues in Bosnia because it has not formed a Government since October 7<sup>th</sup>, 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) although they have reached an agreement to cooperate in forming a Government,*



*it seems that they still cannot overcome 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 (although they are in favor of joining NATO). 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. EU path is too far for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU. 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. Bosnia faces a significant problem of illegal migration which may lead in new disputes between state's ethnicities. Government's proposal for Army units deployment in the Montenegro and Serbia borders was rejected by the ethnic Serb Dodik. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and other Muslim countries approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests.*



**BULGARIA:** July 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Bulgarian Navy corvette BODRI is taking part in "Sea Breeze – 2019", the exercise in the Black Sea co-hosted by the US and Ukraine, Bulgaria's Defense Ministry said. "Sea Breeze – 2019", the 19th such exercise, began on July 1<sup>st</sup> and continues until July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The BODRI sailed from Varna on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 to take part in the exercise, held in the port of Odessa and the territorial waters of Ukraine. Exercise "Sea Breeze" is designed to enhance interoperability among participating nations and strengthen regional security by focusing on a variety of security and stability scenarios in the areas of land, sea and air. Ukraine and the US are co-hosting the exercise in the Black Sea with participation and support coming from 17 other countries, including Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. Some of the training areas include maritime interdiction operations, air defense, special forces training, anti-submarine warfare, damage control tactics, search and rescue, amphibious warfare, and a noncommissioned



officer leadership course to include training in operational planning. US participation includes the Arleigh Burke class guided-missile destroyer USS CARNEY, the expeditionary fast-transport ship USNS YUMA, a P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, US Marines from Marine Rotational Force-Europe, Navy Underwater Construction Team UCT-1B, and members of the US Naval Forces Europe-Africa and US 6th Fleet staff. ([www.sofiaglobe.com](http://www.sofiaglobe.com))

- July 5<sup>th</sup>, Bulgaria's Grand Mufti's Office called on the Police to investigate an attack on its office in the capital, Sofia, as a "hate crime." The windows of the building in central Sofia were smashed with stones by an unknown person on Thursday, three days after swastikas and other hate symbols were scratched onto a mosque in the central town of Karlovo on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. *"This is a typical hate crime. Unfortunately in Bulgaria no one is being convicted of such crimes. They are always declared as [the work of] drunks or hooligans,"* Jelal Faik, Spokesperson of the Grand Mufti's office, told Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN). He added that the attack was recorded by security cameras, which showed the perpetrator taking stones out of a bag and throwing them at the window, which he said was a *"clear sign that this was a planned and deliberate act."* Faik said the presence of the nationalist United Patriots union in the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) -lead coalition Government, had encouraged anti-Muslim attitudes among some people. *"If we neglect this act, it means that we are closing our eyes to far more serious national phenomena where everyone different can*

*be targeted,"* he said, recalling that the synagogue in Sofia also was attacked with stones in January. Rights groups say Bulgaria's failure to tackle hate crime is fuelling violence and prejudice against minority groups, including asylum seekers, migrants, Muslims and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Ruslan Trad, a Bulgarian journalist and member of the Muslim community, said fear was widespread among Bulgarian Muslims. *"There is fear. The Muslim community ... actively discusses those events [the recent attacks] and views them as [part of] an anti-Muslim policy on the state level,"* he said. Muslims are a significant community in Bulgaria and are mostly descended from ethnic Turks, or from Slavs who converted during several centuries of Ottoman Turkish rule. According to the 2011 census, Muslims make up just fewer than 8% of the population, but some more recent estimates put the figure at 15%. Unlike the migrant communities of Western Europe, Bulgarian Muslims show little interest in religious extremism. ([www.balkaninsight.com](http://www.balkaninsight.com))

- July 6<sup>th</sup>, Bulgaria's Foreign Ministry said that the Serbian Ambassador was being summoned to a meeting at the Ministry on Monday in connection with comments made by Serbia's Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic about Prime Minister Boiko Borissov's reported remarks about Kosovo and the nominee to be EU Foreign Policy Chief. Dacic slammed Bulgarian Borissov over reported comments that the nominee to be the next EU Foreign Policy Chief, Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Borrell, should respect the position of the EU on Kosovo rather than that of Madrid. In an interview with Radio Television Serbia, Dacic said that Borissov should respect the EU

position on Kosovo – which, according to Dacic, is that Kosovo was not independent – rather than trying to give a lesson to Borrell. Kosovo unilaterally declared independence in 2008 from Serbia, which does not recognize it as independent. Twenty-three of the current 28 EU member states, among them Bulgaria, recognize Kosovo as independent. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*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. After European elections, opposition BSP appears weakened facing internal problems. 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:** July 4<sup>th</sup>, opposition has called for a vote of no confidence in Lovro Kuscevic in the wake of allegations that he reaped huge profits from land that was acquired and rezoned while he was the head of Nerezisca Municipality on Brac. The opposition has accused him of putting his private, property-related interests before the public interest and abusing his powers for personal gain. The motion, signed by 43 Deputies, was put forward by the Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske - SDP) and supported by the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka - HSS), Civic Liberal Alliance (Građansko-liberalni Savez – GLAS), the group of independent MPs, People's and Civic Engagement Party (Stranka Narodnog i Građanskog Aktivizma – SNAGA), MP Goran Aleksić, and MP Ivan Lovrinović of the Let's Change Croatia (Promijenimo Hrvatsku – PH) party. After a meeting of the ruling coalition partners, which included the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ) Branko Babić, Milorad Batinac of the Croatian People's Party - Liberal Democrats (Hrvatska Narodna Stranka - Liberalni Demokrati – HNS) and Milorad Pupovac of the Independent Democratic Serb Party (Samostalna Demokratska Srpska Stranka – SDSS), Pupovac said he hoped the matter would never come to a debate, indicating he believed Kuscevic should step down. Speaking to reporters before the meeting, Pupovac said that “someone

*should leave the Government but I hope that will not be the coalition partners.” HDZ members have avoided questions about Kuscevic's political fate, repeating that Ministers serve at the pleasure of the Prime Minister. Asked if his HNS might leave the Government, Batinic declined to offer a direct answer, saying that everything would be communicated to the Prime Minister, adding “See you next week after the meeting with the Prime Minister.” Social Democrat Pedja Grbin, whose party filed the motion, said earlier today that the HDZ had assumed responsibility for Kuscevic's actions. “We expect all members of Parliament to say 'No' to Lovro Kuscevic and to thievery. If the People's Party will join us, good, if not, it will only demonstrate that they are consistent in their actions over the last two years since they joined this crooked Government,” Grbin said. He noted that many HDZ Deputies admitted in private conversations that Kuscevic's conduct was unacceptable. “Now they will have a chance to show if they practice what they preach,” he added. The Government has eight days to respond to the motion. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)*

- July 4<sup>th</sup>, following the unanimous backing of Parliament's Defense Committee and the National Security Council Government on Thursday established an interdepartmental Commission for the procurement of multi-purpose combat aircraft for the Croatian Air Force. The Commission will be in charge of preparing and conducting the process of procurement of 12 multi-purpose fighter jets and will propose decisions to be made by the Government and other institutions. It will also be in charge of defining possible options for pilots' training. The body will be co-chaired by the Head of the office of the Prime

Minister, Zvonimir Frka-Petesic and the Director of the Armed Forces General Staff, Rear Admiral Robert Hranj. A previous effort to purchase F-16s from Israel was quashed by Washington, which did not approve the sale of the jets it had given to Israel for free. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- July 7<sup>th</sup>, Eurozone Finance Ministers will discuss Croatia's bid to take the first step towards adopting the euro, the paper Jutarnji list reported in Sunday's editions. Croatia's Government sent a request to Brussels last Thursday asking to join the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM II), which is regarded as the waiting room for the eurozone. The letter of intent was signed by Finance Minister Zdravko Maric and Croatian National Bank Governor Boris Vujcic. According to the report, eurozone Finance Ministers will formally accept the request on Monday, just as they did a year ago, when they gave Bulgaria the green light to begin preparing for the introduction of the European single currency. It is to be expected that, just like in Bulgaria's case, they will give Croatia one year to complete the requirements to enter ERM II. Any country wanting to join the Eurozone is expected to spend at least two years in the waiting room. During that time the value of the kuna against the euro must remain within the given range. Although European Commissioner for the euro Valdis Dombrovskis said in January of this year that Bulgaria was expected to join ERM II by the middle of this year, it has yet to receive the green light from Brussels, Jutarnji list reports. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

**COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :**

*The country enjoys political stability and support from EU towards its Eurozone goal. On Monday July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 the Eurozone Finance Ministers will accept or not Croatia's request to enter the ERMII; an important step towards the eurozone. It is assessed that low political crisis with Minister Kusevic will be resolved by the Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic before becomes a major problem in the Parliament. Croatia follows a tough regional policy with neighboring countries. It is openly intervene in Bosnia's internal affairs, while it maintains open disputes with Slovenia, Serbia, and Bosnia. One should take into consideration that Croatia shows its military strength and capabilities quite often not only in international, but also in national level sending strong messages to neighboring countries. Apart from that, Croatia pays special attention in energy strategy and security announcing ambitious projects. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone. It 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:** July 4<sup>th</sup>, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Thursday Cyprus could do nothing to stop Turkey from drilling for natural gas, and if it tried it would get a response like in the past. Ankara's top diplomat also said that their drilling activity inside the island's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) was in response to the Republic's failure to guarantee the rights of

Turkish Cypriots. He said the Republic protested to the EU in a bid to secure decisions against Turkey but it failed "*because we made the necessary briefings.*" Stressing that Turkey notified the UN and the EU over its activities in the eastern Mediterranean, Cavusoglu said all steps taken by Turkey are in compliance with international law. He also highlighted that Turkey, as the country with the longest continental coastline, has legitimate rights and vital interests in the eastern Mediterranean and that it has been fully exercising its sovereign rights over its continental shelf in accordance with international law. Ankara has consistently contested Cyprus' natural gas activities in the eastern Mediterranean, claiming that Turkish Cypriots also had rights to the resources in the area. In a similar vein, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan appeared to issue a threat to Cyprus or any other parties attempting to deny his country access to natural gas resources in the eastern Mediterranean. "*We are taking all legitimate steps and shall continue doing so. But should some quarters, who do not recognize [international] law, stand in our way, then we too can speak the language they understand,*" the Turkish leader told reporters after concluding a tour in China. Responding later in the day, Nicosia said it would not track Turkey in its "*rhetoric of tension and confrontation.*" In a written statement, Government Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou recalled the conclusions of the European Council summit of June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019 which stated that the sovereign rights of Cyprus must be respected. Main opposition Progressive Party of Working People (Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laoú - AKEL) said Cavusoglu's

threats were unacceptable and offensive. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- July 6<sup>th</sup>, Turkey announced that drilling off Karpasia is expected to start within a week, reports said on Saturday. Turkish Energy Minister Fatih Donmez told Turkish news agency Anadolu that Turkey's second drillship, the Yavuz, is expected to start drilling off Karpasia within the week. At the moment, the Yavuz is docked in Mersin in southern Turkey for refueling and final checks, Donmez said. *"Within a week we will start the first drilling with the Yavuz in the Eastern Mediterranean in Karpasia, in the area we have been licensed by the TRNC,"* Donmez said. In early May Turkey sent its first drillship, the Fatih, to waters well inside Cyprus' notional Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), at a location about 60 km west of Paphos. Ankara said drilling has begun. The Government said this week it has initiated legal proceedings against three companies cooperating with the state-owned Turkish petroleum company TPAO for encroaching on the island's continental shelf. An official said that the Government would do the same with the Yavuz. Last month, the European Council summit announced that the EU had adopted the recommendation by President Nicos Anastasiades for concrete support in restraining illegal Turkish drilling activities in Cyprus' EEZ. The EU28 leaders called on the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to submit *"options for appropriate measures"* against Turkey *"without delay"* due to the country's refusal to conform to international law and EU calls for restraint with regard to its drilling activities. Turkish top officials however, declare that Cyprus cannot stop

them and will continue carrying out drillings in what they classify as their own continental shelf. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- July 6<sup>th</sup>, the Turkish Presidency has set up an institution to smoothly coordinate the relations of the Turkish Government with the breakaway regime in the north, reports said on Saturday. According to Anadolu news agency, the task of coordinator will either be entrusted to a Turkish Vice President or a Minister. The aim of this new body will be to contribute to the efforts to develop the breakaway regime by ensuring the planning and coordination of financial and technical assistance by Turkey. According to reports, any agreement between Turkish public organizations and the Turkish Cypriots will require the consent of this coordinating body. The body will monitor and evaluate the economic program of Turkey concerning the Turkish Cypriot community. A technical committee will be involved in the procedures while there are provisions for setting up temporary working groups of experts who would monitor and assess the application of the financial programs agreed between Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, report said. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Cyprus has reached a deadlock in the ongoing crisis with Turkish invasion of drillship Fatih (while the second one Yavuz is also ready to start drills) within its EEZ. Fatih is there almost three months, while Turkish administration declares that offshore drilling will start soon. Despite international calls to Turkey for abandoning its plans of violating the Cypriot EEZ and its*

sovereign rights, Turkish actions remain “unanswered.” Announcement of Cypriot administration that arrest warrants have been issued against workers in the drillship are interpreted as spasmodic actions of a trapped state which cannot act decisively and effectively for protecting its sovereignty. Actually, Cyprus is trapped because it does not have a mechanism of power (military, diplomatic, economic etc) to force Turkey to withdraw its ships. Cyprus lacks of naval and air forces which could deter Turkey of violating Cypriot sovereign rights, while Greece appears reluctant in sending naval units in the region showing presence and exercising deterrence. Cyprus working closely with Greece achieved to convince EU leaders to introduce a joint declaration condemning Turkish actions and warning Turkey with undefined sanctions. Turkish message is very clear; we are present in Cyprus, we are present in the energy “game” and nothing works leaving Turkey aside. In other words, energy security includes Turkey; otherwise eastern Mediterranean is not a stable and secure sea. A “hot” incident cannot be excluded. Announcement of a Cypriot NAVTEX for naval exercises from July 1<sup>st</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> is a sign of possible escalation since Cypriot naval units (small patrol vessels) and Turkish vessels may operate in the same sea area. 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. 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 senate voted on the abolishment of the arms embargo in Cyprus but the term of forbidding Russians vessels from using Cypriot ports may create more problems than it would solve. 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. However, President Nikos Anastasiades appeared of promoting restart of talks for solving the Cypriot question but suggested that Turkish provocations should stop. 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:** July 1<sup>st</sup>, Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos will not sign a presidential decree green-lighting the appointment by the outgoing Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) Government of the new Prosecutor and President of the Supreme Court, leaving the selection to the administration that will emerge after the July 7th,



2019 snap election. The Justice Ministry in May launched proceedings to replace the Court's President Vasilios Peppas and Prosecutor Xeni Dimitriou, who stepped down on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 having reached the obligatory retirement age. Pavlopoulos' reasoning reportedly is that the selections were made during the campaign period and the gesture is interpreted as disapproval of the Government's political expediency. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras had repeatedly insisted he was confident Pavlopoulos would approve the changes. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- July 5<sup>th</sup>, Turkey has issued a navigational telex (NAVTEX) reserving a large area south of the island of Kastellorizo, within Greece's continental shelf, for military exercises on Sunday as Greeks go to general elections. The Turkish NAVTEX has reserved an area stretching from the south of Kastellorizo westwards towards Rhodes for exercises that will use live ammunition. The move comes in the wake of claims by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that Ankara will take “*necessary steps*” to prevent Cyprus from drilling for hydrocarbons in its exclusive economic zone, and threats by Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu to Nicosia that any effort to stop Turkey from carrying out its plans to drill in the area would meet with an aggressive response. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- July 7<sup>th</sup>, center-right New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) surged to a decisive victory in general elections on Sunday, paving the way for leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis to form a comfortable majority Government this week. With 86.4% of votes counted, ND had secured 39.77%, over Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) 31.55% – a

more resilient performance than had been expected. This translates to 158 seats for ND and 86 for SYRIZA. Center-left Movement for Change (Κίνημα Αλλαγής - KINAL) came in third with 7.94% (22 seats), and the Greek Communist Party (Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας - KKE) with 5.35% (15 seats). Far right, neo-Nazi Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή – ΧΑ) was out of Greece's Parliament after failing to reach the 3% threshold with 2.96%. However, the nationalist, pro-Russian Greek Solution (Ελληνική Λύση), which drew a significant proportion of GD's voters, made it into the House with 3.74% (10 seats) and MeRA25, the party of former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, secured 3.48% (9 seats). He said Parliament will work during the summer and that his party does not require a grace period. Mitsotakis will be sworn in on Monday while his cabinet will also be announced. The members of the cabinet will be sworn in on Tuesday while its first meeting will take place on Wednesday. It was also announced that Parliament will open on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Conceding defeat, outgoing Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said that he “*absolutely*” accepted the verdict of the people. Abstention was at around 44%, close to a record for general elections in Greece. Voters flocked to hundreds of polling centers around the country. (www.ekathimerini.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Early parliamentary elections were held in Greece on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019 with center-right ND achieving an important victory allowing it to form a strong majority Government. Ruling SYRIZA got the second place while far-right Golden Dawn*



*failed to enter the Parliament (when far-right parties gain ground in Europe). Next day finds Greece enjoying political stability ready to face the ongoing diplomatic and security challenges mainly by Turkey. Internal terrorism is considered as a major unresolved problem of national security undermining stability of the state. Greek – Turkish relations are in critical point 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. Greece acting in coordination and cooperation with Cyprus achieved to convince EU member states to adopt a rather strict joint declaration speaking for potential sanctions against Turkey if continues to violate Cypriot EEZ. However, sanctions are still far from decided and imposed. 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 keep on violating Greek airspace. It is a fact that Greek political and military leadership is concerned over a potential incident with Turkey, especially if its drillships appear within Greek waters. 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:** July 2<sup>nd</sup>, Kosovo's President Hashim Thaci submitted to the Parliament the draft resolution on Serbia's southern Presevo Valley region demanding the Deputies and Pristina's institutions to endorse the will of the Albanians to join Kosovo but it was not passed due to the lack of the assembly's quorum, the KoSSev web site reported. The predominantly Albanian population voted to join Kosovo in a referendum in 1992, supported by a local guerilla force in the uprising which Belgrade suppressed. Thaci believes that the Valley's Albanians requests are legitimate and in line with international law, but the Kosovo Parliament vote on the draft resolution will have to wait for a session with the necessary quorum. That was the first concrete step Thaci took after advocating the annexation of Serbia's region for a while within his idea of border correction with Serbia. He excluded any division of Kosovo's territory in return. Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic said he favored a separation with the Albanians but never gave any detail. The assumption is he has in mind Kosovo's four municipalities in the north with a Serb majority to remain a part of Serbia after a final agreement in the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations currently on hold. On Tuesday, Marko Djuric, the Head of Serbia's Government Office for Kosovo

accused Thaci of “spreading false dreams about the annexation of the Vranje Valley by self-declared Kosovo.” (www.rs.n1info.com)

- July 3<sup>rd</sup>, according to media in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci, has rejected an invitation of Milorad Dodik to visit Sarajevo. Chairman of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s (BiH’s) Presidency Milorad Dodik, invited Thaci to attend the upcoming regional summit of SEECP set to be held in Sarajevo. According to BiH online media Klix.ba, Kosovo President Thaci has rejected Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik’s invitation, Gazeta Express reports. Klix.ba quoting its sources reports that Thaci is not expected to attend the regional summit considering that Bosnia-Herzegovina does not recognize Kosovo’s independence. The South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Summit will be held on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and will be attended by Ministers and Presidents of the South-East Europe. According to Klix.ba until now the participation in the Summit was confirmed by Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Montenegro President Milo Djukanovic and Albanian President Ilir Meta. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- July 3<sup>rd</sup>, Ramush Haradinaj, Kosovo’s Prime Minister, said he would accept to lead the dialogue on the normalization of relations with Belgrade under two conditions, one concerning local and the other international issues, the Beta news agency reported on Wednesday. He said he could take the role of the leading negotiator if there were participation of both authorities and opposition and if mutual recognition with Serbia was a part of the dialogue agenda. “I can lead the

*Government, but I cannot represent Kosovo without the participation of all stakeholders,”* Haradinaj said. Regarding the other condition, he said it is necessary to secure the framework to enable the mutual recognition of the two countries within the existing borders; otherwise he would not accept to take part in the dialogue, since, according to him, in such a case there is no basis for the talks to resume. In previous years, Kosovo’s President Hashim Thaci led dialogue under EU auspices with his Serbia’s counterpart Aleksandar Vucic on the other side of the table. Haradinaj and Thaci entered what seemed to be an internal clash with Prime Minister getting tremendous support after his Government introduced the 100% import tariffs on goods from Serbia and Bosnia in retaliation for Pristina’s failure to join Interpol last November blaming Belgrade’s aggressive campaign for it. Both Vucic and Thaci indicated some border changes between Serbia and Kosovo, but Haradinaj said it would be detrimental, while the international community feared a domino effect and disturbance of regional security. (www.rs.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

*Kosovo keeps escalating tension with Serbia blocking any chance of dialogue restart. Latest Police operation in the north arresting Serbs (and Albanians), 100% tax on Serbian and Bosnian products, Kosovo Assembly resolution that Serbs committed genocide during 1998-1999 war, establishment of Kosovo Army, request for a special Court for Serbs are just a few actions which undermine any possibility of negotiations with Serbia. By keep repeating in every forum that*

*there is nothing else to talk than “Serbia recognizing Kosovo” it simply does not promote dialogue. Pristina does not hesitate to escalate tension even with an armed conflict. Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci stated that his state could be unified with Albania including parts of south Serbia (Presevo, Bujanovac and Medveja). Such statements are not only immature, but also put under risk peace and stability in the region. Thaci openly speaks for border change and more specific violent change. It is strongly recommended that international community, namely the UN, EU and US should terminate decisively such irresponsible ideas. Internal disputes have emerged regarding Kosovo negotiation team. Constitutional Court ruled President’s Thaci leading role as unconstitutional allowing the Government to form a new 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. 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. Kosovo seeks its Army 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:** July 1<sup>st</sup>, the whole leadership of the opposition Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM) has tendered resignation. Such decision was taken at the PDM National Council meeting held last Saturday; two weeks after the party had gone over to the opposition and Prime Minister Pavel Filip had announced his Government’s resignation. “So, on June 29 the PDM Secretary General and the PDM Deputy Chairpersons tendered resignations. As you know, Party Chairman Vlad Plahotniuc had announced his resignation at the beginning of this week,” Filip said, who, according to the PDM National Council’s decision, will be acting as party Head until the party congress scheduled for July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019. “The congress will elect a new party leadership and adopt a new Party Program called to reform the organization. The Democratic Party shall remain a powerful political party absolutely necessary for the republic. PDM has always promoted balance in the Moldovan politics. Now such a balance is vitally necessary as well because the incumbent ruling coalition of left and right forces is absolutely unnatural,” stated the former Prime Minister. ([www.infotag.md](http://www.infotag.md))

- July 1<sup>st</sup>, the strategic goal of Romania is support of Moldova’s European vector, Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister Teodor Melescanu said at a joint press conference with Foreign Affairs and European Integration Minister Nicu Popescu in Bucharest. Melescanu said that Bucharest appreciated the fact that the first official visits, both by the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister of Moldova, were paid to Romania. The diplomat specified that Romania committed to

back Moldova for the resumption of the financing on behalf of the EU. For his part, Popescu said that in Bucharest the sides had discussed bilateral projects, as well as the ones of energy inter-connection. Popescu noted that the subject of federalization, spread in the last time, cannot become reality and Moldova has already stably connected to the European space. (www.moldpres.md)

- July 1<sup>st</sup>, at the June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 elections of the Bashkan [Governor] of the southern Moldovan autonomous region of Gagauzia, victory was won by the incumbent Head of the region's executive power, Irina Vlah, journalists were told by the regional Election Commission Chairman Ivan Komur. "According to yet preliminary data, Irina Vlah received the votes of 49,742 residents of Gagauzia or of 91.93%. The election was recognized as valid, with a voter turnout of 50.35%," said Komur. The rest 3 candidates have polled Sergey Cimpoei – 3,932 votes (7.27%), Ivan Burguji – 481 votes (0.89%), Dmitry Manol – 346 votes (0.64%). Yet on Sunday night, Irina Vlah received congratulations from Moldova President Igor Dodon, who came to Gagauzia after the closure of polling stations. Vlad said that she had held a telephone talk with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak, who also congratulated her on the victory. "I have already rolled up my sleeves, and am ready to continue my daily job. Gagauzia must live in peace and stability," stated the Bashkan. The Gagauzia autonomy was established in 1994 in southern Moldova. It is home to about 150 thousand Gagauz people – a Turkic-language national minority worshipping Orthodox Christianity. (www.infotag.md)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Newly elected Government has started to demonstrate its commitment in pro-western orientation of the country. A long discussion has started regarding co-existence of pro-Western ACUM block and pro-Russian Socialists. By definition, this cooperation is not compatible and it is interesting to watch the motives not only of the two political formations, but also of the US, Russia, and EU which gave the green light in such cooperation. Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. There are assessments that this co-existence will not last for long and new elections will come. Newly elected Government enjoying support of PSRM and ACUM block Deputies is moving rapidly in changes of executives in critical state institutions in order to consolidate its power. The new Government is determined to investigate all "dark" activities of Democrats during their ruling period. Moreover, parliamentary majority has established a Committee to investigate a potential coup attempt by PDM during June 8<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019. It seems that the country has avoided turbulence and political chaos especially after former Prime Minister Pavel Filip announced that PDM will join Parliament as opposition. Needless to say that the country has come in the edge of civil turbulence. It seems that political stability and normality are establishing in the state.. The EU tough policy against Moldova may soften now as a signal of support to the new Government which includes a pro-western party. Such support could be expressed by restarting micro-economic assistance. 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 be unnoticed by international stakeholders. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.*



**MONTENEGRO:** July 1<sup>st</sup>, regular parliamentary elections in Montenegro are due in one year and four months. Governing coalition parties, led by Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS), have realized that there is no time to waste and they have started renewing party infrastructure and rejuvenating staff in the party authorities. Montenegrin opposition, or at least, the majority of opposition parties, has stalled. Trapped in the boycott of the Parliament, they have constantly been missing the chances of shaking the “*eternal power*,” writes Pobjeda. For DPS, the campaign has already started. For years, the governing party has been cultivating the myth of their infallibility and invincibility. However, some important DPS officials and former Mayors among them were convicted of being involved of some wicked affairs. In addition, they lost power in local elections in Berane, Budva, Kotor, Rozaje and Plav. These events have turned the red alarm on. In presidential elections in May 2018, DPS employed new strategy. Its candidate, Ivan Vukovic was not a publicly exposed politician, as the leader of the electoral list. That decision has ensured their coalition convincing victory and absolute power. At the beginning of April, main DPS board has called elections in municipal institutions and the Capital Board. DPS leader,

Milo Djukanovic, then said that “*people who are capable and ready to face the challenges of modern times*” should be elected. DPS is assertive when it comes to their claims that they are the guarantee of stability and statehood, and fulfillment of external policy priorities. In the past two years, Montenegrin opposition has been trying to reach an agreement on a joint strategy, wasting time on boycotting the Parliament, disputing and missing the chances of become homogeneous. When civil protests began and the “*Resist*” movement was set up, all opposition members signed the “*Agreement on Future*” and obliged not to come back to the Parliament. They requested formation of technical Government and wanted President of the country, Parliament, Government, Supreme Court to resign. Democratic Front (Demokratski Front - DF) members returned to Parliament, just like Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska Partija - SDP), Democratic Alliance (Demokratski Savez - DEMOS) and United Montenegro (Ujedinjena Crna Gora - UCG) members did. That is how they wasted a great amount on energy. Opposition stratification is continuing with the creation of new political alliances. ([www.cdm.me](http://www.cdm.me))

- July 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska Partija - SDP) urged all the relevant representatives of the Government and the opposition for a constructive dialogue, having in mind the level of public’s distrust in the election process. According to them, the technical Government, as a legal and political guarantee, represents a key element for creating the democratic election environment in Montenegro. SDP is ready to closely cooperate with all the opposition structures in order to create a



democratic election environment. As for cooperation in terms of political programs, it is possible only with those political forces which share common basic political principles. “A comprehensive political dialogue must include the highest political representatives of the Government and the opposition, along with concrete topics, that is, the discussion on the legal - political guarantees and complete reform of the election and other legislation. We remind you that this model was used while preparing the parliamentary dialogue in the end of 2015 and beginning of 2016,” SDP said. (www.cdm.me)

- July 2<sup>nd</sup>, after welcoming Ambassador of Finland to Montenegro, Kimmo Lahdevirta, and wishing him success in his work, Montenegro Prime Minister, Dusko Markovic thanked Finland for providing support to Montenegro on its path towards the EU accession, stressing the country's [Montenegro's] commitment to pursuing reforms in order to achieve European standards. Markovic said he is hopeful that during the Finnish presidency, which started yesterday, Montenegro will open the only remaining negotiation chapter (chapter 8) and bring to an end the work on reports that will define the internal willingness to close certain negotiation chapters. Ambassador Lahdevirta informed the Prime Minister about the priorities of the Finnish presidency over the Council of the EU, saying that his country will promote the enlargement policy and that all the Western Balkan countries must have a European perspective. Finland, according to him, advocates for the regatta principle, i.e. the individual assessment of success of each candidate country. (www.cdm.me)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Although EC Progress Report is assessed as a positive one, it raises specific concerns over media freedom, corruption and organized crime. Report is elaborating on specific cases signaling detailed research. Montenegro enters in a crucial crossroad regarding its EU future and specific reforms and actions should be implemented if it remains committed in its goal to access the EU by 2025. Political stability is re-establishing again after opposition decision to return in parliamentary Committees. 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. However, protesters movement has lost dynamics and ruling DPS is more stable. Nevertheless, opposition insists on demanding establishment of a technical Government and early parliamentary elections. The EU and US 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; However, the state needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. 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:** July 1<sup>st</sup>, camps of refugees from Middle East in North Macedonia seem empty, but authorities and humanitarian organizations raise the alarm about the increase in the number of refugees coming into the country. In April, these refugee centers welcomed 22 people, while in May welcomed 19. Meanwhile, the number of refugees crossing the border illegally has become a cause for concern for the authorities, which have boosted security measures in border crossing areas. Based on the data released by the Interior Ministry, around 4,500 people have been stopped in April and May in an attempt of crossing the border with Greece illegally. *“We have stepped up security measures on the border with Greece and our job is to secure the border. We are collaborating with FRONTEX and other countries of the region,”* Interior Minister, Oliver Spasovski said. Mersiha Smailovic of LEGIS organization, said that refugees continue to cross the border illegally and that the majority of them are trying to use North Macedonia as a transit country on their way to EU countries. Two years ago, North Macedonia faced a massive number of refugees coming from the Middle East. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- July 4<sup>th</sup>, North Macedonia’s President Stevo Pendarovski, who is also the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, signed the

ordinance on the insignia of the Army uniforms, renaming them into Army of the Republic of North Macedonia (ARSM). *“The name of the Army is Army of the Republic of North Macedonia and this is now regulated in legislation,”* said Pendarovski during Thursday’s visit to army troops on the southern border. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- July 7<sup>th</sup>, relations between North Macedonia and Serbia are traditionally good and improving, as shown by Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic’s extending his invitation to the Grdelica Valley highway opening ceremony, North Macedonia’s Prime Minister Zoran Zaev told Serbian newspaper Politika. *“Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic and I will soon start to cooperate on another project in the area of digital services and government websites,”* Zaev said in an interview to be published in the paper’s Monday edition. According to Zaev, Serbia and North Macedonia share many goals, most importantly the achieving of European values, which he said would only intensify in the near future. The Prime Minister also said the recent EC report highlighted North Macedonia’s Prespa Agreement as a shining example of solving regional disputes. According to Zaev, the international community is well aware of the need to focus on Western Balkans countries on their path towards EU membership. *“All EU member countries and aspiring members must join forces and support the integration of the entire region as it is the only way of bringing and sustaining peace, stability, and better prospects for everyone,”* said Zaev in an interview for Politika. (www.nezavisen.mk)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :



*VMRO-DPMNE hardens its rhetoric demanding early elections, while the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev tried to change political climate by reshuffling the Government. However, an atmosphere of disappointment is above the country after the EU decision to postpone opening of accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania. Following the European “cold shower” citizens have started to focus on Government’s failures in fight against corruption and organized crime, social care measures, and foreign policy. In other words, domestic politics are not in favor of ruling SDSM and Zoran Zaev. Although NATO accession process is implementing rapidly, EU rejection was a “slap” in the face of North Macedonia’s stability. Zaev based his political survival and dominance in the triptych “resolution of name issue with Greece – NATO accession – opening of EU accession talks.” Although the first one was successfully accomplished and the second is proceeding rapidly the third one has stuck. Consequently, VMRO-DPMNE increased its pressure for a caretaker Government and snap elections. Definitely, North Macedonia and Albania are two different cases regarding their EU future and should not be handled as a single package. The threats of nationalism and political instability are covering North Macedonia’s sky. The country should focus on its economy and major administrative and judicial reforms, fight against corruption and impunity aiming at reaching the EU standards.*



**ROMANIA:** July 1<sup>st</sup>, Senate Speaker and Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE) Chairman,

Calin Popescu Tariceanu has stated that, in his view, the best solution for the presidential election is a Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) – ALDE – PRO Romania (PRO România - PRO) common candidate, a proposal already advanced by PRO leader Victor Ponta. “*Together with Mr. Ponta we have reviewed the options at hand for the presidential election. I confirm what he said. Yes, I think the best solution is indeed to have a common candidate,*” Tariceanu said adding “*a decision in this regard will be taken soon.*” “*Normally, the time is pressing us and we must take this decision as soon as possible in the upcoming period,*” the ALDE Chair stated. In retort on a common candidate, Prime Minister Viorica Dancila, newly elected as PSD chairwoman, has said that “*we will see what is the agreed formula*” depending on the results of the opinion polls. Questioned to comment on the Tariceanu - Ponta’s talks, Dancila replied “*There must be democracy in politics. You can negotiate with any party. We cannot limit a party’s right to discuss with other political parties. I have worked in Brussels nine years and for any amendment, any directive we used to have negotiations with all political groups, except for the extremist parties,*” Dancila said. ([www.romaniajournal.ro](http://www.romaniajournal.ro))

- July 4<sup>th</sup>, Romania will buy another five F16 fighter jets with the same configuration as the 12 already purchased, Defense Minister Gabriel Les announced on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019 Profit.ro reported. Earlier in June, Profit.ro quoting Government documents announced that the state earmarked 250 million euro to buy another five F16 jets from Portugal, which supplied the other 12 fighters received by Romania already. The cost includes

training, refurbishing, logistics, and maintenance. Romania failed to source F16 jets from the US, despite submitting a request in this regard. The country aims at creating a fleet of 36 jets. (www.romania-insider.com)

- July 5<sup>th</sup>, Mayor of the 3<sup>rd</sup> district in Bucharest and an influential member of the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), Robert Negoita will be suspended from the party for six months and Serban Nicolae, the Head of the PSD Senators, lost his position, Hotnews.ro reported. Both decisions were reportedly taken in response to the criticism expressed by the two men. Decisions were taken late on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019 in an informal meeting of the party's leadership, under the supervision of Prime Minister Viorica Dancila, who was confirmed as the President of the party on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Robert Negoita criticized Dancila and the Government on several occasions, claiming that the local administration face problems exactly because of the actions of the central Government. As for Serban Nicolae, Dancila proposed personally to replace him at the top of the PSD caucus in the Senate. He will be replaced by Liviu Mazilu. Nicolae has recently objected to Dancila's support for the Governor of the National Bank of Romania (BNR) Mugur isarescu. He was also accused by the PSD Secretary General, Mihai Fifor that he refused to collect a signature for the constitutional amendment initiative. (www.romania-insider.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*It seems that political normality and stability are appearing again in the Romanian horizon after*

*Dragnea's imprisonment. Although ruling PSD provided signs of abandoning its previous agenda on controversial justice amendments and control of state's justice system the Venice Commission "slapped" once again the Romanian justice reform. The EU has already sent its satisfaction via the Justice Commissioner who said that triggering of article 7 of the EU Treaty against Romania it is not an option at the moment. Ruling PSD has a new leader; the Prime Minister Viorica Dancila who immediately took action within the party in order to fully control it. She has already suspended two prominent party officials aiming at eliminating its opponents within PSD. Presidential elections have been scheduled for November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019 the first round and followed by a second round on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in case it is needed. 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:** July 1<sup>st</sup>, apart from the West pressuring Serbia, US and its allies keep encouraging Kosovo to maintain tensions in the region, stated newly appointed Russian Ambassador, Alexander Bocan-Harchenko for Sputnik. According to him those pressures are undoubtedly present in the pre-accession negotiation process that the EU conducts with

Serbia, while the Americans exert even stronger pressure on Serbia. Moreover, there is no evidence whatsoever that Belgrade interests are taken into account in any form, while pursuing compromising solutions. *“The West, primarily Washington D.C, offers exclusive support to Kosovo Albanians, to their military structures and moves taken when it comes to army related issues, leading to obvious further strengthening of tensions,”* underlined Bocan - Harchenko, adding that Moscow truly hopes that tension on Kosovo territory will not evolve into a major conflict. *“I sincerely hope that Europe will perceive that situation is getting dangerous and that it could get out of control, leading to more serious conflicts if the situation is ignored,”* the Ambassador concluded. Moscow will ask for the full investigation to be conducted that would bring to justice the ones responsible for the assault on the Russian UN staffer Mikhail Krasnoshchekov Bocan-Harchenko stated. He said that this is an example of *“unprecedented incident”* that he has not witnessed anywhere else in the world, and that it *“represents an open aggression towards the citizens of the Russian Federation.”* He added that no reaction to this incident on the part of EU is also unacceptable. *“The attempt to justify the assaults of Kosovo Albanians is not in accordance with the human approach towards UNMIK staffer that did his job successfully under highly difficult conditions and under the UN mandate,”* the Ambassador concluded. (www.b92.net)

- July 7<sup>th</sup>, Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic said that his country has managed to supply stores in the north of Kosovo over the past couple of days, despite the 100% tariffs Pristina introduced

on Serbian goods. *“It is not always easy and I believe that we will ensure that people are not hungry and thirsty, but that they live normal lives,”* Vucic said. He said that the crisis is continuing; however to a much lesser extent and that a lot of work has been done in the past few days. Speaking about possible countermeasures against Pristina, Vucic said that he *“is thinking about it on daily basis,”* but that it is more important for him to provide enough food to citizens in northern Kosovo. *“It is more important for us not to gain political benefits by attacking somebody with fierce and powerful words. My concern is people in Kosovo and Metohija,”* Vucic said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- July 7<sup>th</sup>, Serbia and Bulgaria have excellent relations, and the latest developments and statements by the officials of both countries are only temporary misunderstandings, Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic said. *“Bulgaria has recognized the independence of Kosovo, Serbia does not recognize it, and this is our difference. We have good relations regarding everything else, this is a temporary misunderstanding,”* Vucic said, announcing that he will talk to Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and President Rumen Radov next week. *“We have members of the Bulgarian minority in Serbia and I wish that they feel like home,”* he said. He added that he would personally advocate for *“returning onto the track of good relations”* with Bulgaria as soon as possible. Serbia's Foreign Affairs Minister Ivica Dacic recently told Borissov to respect the EU's position on Kosovo's independence rather than to *“deliver lessons”* to newly elected European Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell. Dacic reacted to Borissov's

comment that the Spanish diplomat should represent the EU's interests regarding Kosovo's independence and not those of his own country, which does not recognize Kosovo's sovereignty. Dacic said the EU position *"is that Kosovo is not independent."* Bulgarian media wrote that Serbia's Ambassador in Sofia will be summoned for a meeting with Bulgaria's Foreign Affairs Minister Ekaterina Zakhariyeva because of Dacic's statement. (www.rs.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*The country has entered in a period of fragile political stability due to citizens' reactions against governmental practices regarding human rights, media freedom, and elections transparency. Although protesters insist on organizing protests, it seems that opposition reactions lose momentum. President Alexander Vucic announced that elections (parliamentary and local) will be held on March or April 2020. Opposition said that if its requests will not be fulfilled, elections will be boycotted. It is assessed that Vucic feels more confident that fully controls political situation in Serbia and there is no need for early elections at the moment. Regarding Belgrade – Pristina dialogue there is nothing to be expected in the near future; the whole process has reached a deadlock. Armed Forces are in full alert but without any deployment of units across Serbia – Kosovo border. Serbia strengthens its relations with Russia (and China) seeking stronger support regarding Kosovo case. Security situation is complex and uncertain especially after Police operations in Northern Kosovo (with Serbian majority population) which endangers the possibility of armed violence. None could predict*

*Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation including) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. At the moment, Serbia looks like acting in accordance with the international law aiming at reducing tension in the region. In other words state's leadership is acting in a "reasonable" and "wise" way avoiding mistakes of the past which have isolated Serbia from the international community. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its armed forces declaring towards all sides that its Armed Forces are the power of the state.*



**SLOVENIA:** July 3<sup>rd</sup>, Foreign Minister Miro Cerar and his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian signed in Paris a new action plan for a 2019 – 2020 strategic partnership between the two countries. The pair also broached the appointment process for the EU's top posts and the Western Balkans, the Foreign Ministry said. Cerar said the new agreement would enrich existing cooperation and provide a new momentum. He noted it also covered the time when Slovenia and France would successively preside over the EU in 2021 and 2022. Cerar is confident the action plan, which focuses on cooperation in science and innovation, information, communication technology and artificial intelligence, will contribute to closer economic cooperation, with France already being Slovenia's fifth trading partner. The Foreign Ministry added that an important part of the talks had been dedicated to the strengthening of multilateralism. France plays a key role here as a

permanent member of the UN Security Council. Also was broached migration, terrorism and climate change, with Cerar calling for European solutions to migration issues. (www.sta.si)

- July 5<sup>th</sup>, while protests were held in the Slovenian – Italian border area against the planned border control measures, the Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini spoke on the phone with his Slovenian counterpart Bostjan Poklukar to discuss migration and enhancing cooperation in this field. The two Ministers welcomed the start of Slovenian – Italian joint Police patrols in the border. The two countries launched joint Police patrols on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 due to the increased illegal migration. The measure is expected to be in force until the end of September. Salvini reiterated yesterday that if border controls fail to fulfill their task, Italy will erect physical barriers on the border with Slovenia. *“We will make the border with Slovenia impenetrable with all available means,”* Salvini said. Poklukar stressed that Slovenia is protecting its borders with Croatia effectively and that situation is under control. According to him, special attention should be paid to the entire Western Balkan migration route and take appropriate measures. The Italian press agency ANSA reported that Salvini said in Trieste that *“joint patrols by Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia are something we are establishing and we will see what the results will be.”* Asked about this issue the Slovenian Interior Minister said that he could not go into detail at this point. In the meanwhile, several protests are being held or are to be held in the area of both sides of borders and on border crossings demonstrating protesters’ opposition in the issue. (www.sta.si)

- July 6<sup>th</sup>, the opposition Left party (Levica) Head Luka Mecec said that if ruling coalition fails to implement the projects agreed with his party, then the Left will withdraw from supporting the minority Government. Current situation and evaluation of projects implementation will be held on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019. *“Situation is not good. We conclude that the Government is not taking us seriously,”* Mecec said. Cooperation did not work properly so far Mecec said and he seeks progress in four out of 13 projects until mid July. According to him progress should be reached until July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 when situation will be evaluated. Otherwise, cooperation with minority Government will be ended. Mecec underlined that all positive effects have been benefited by the Government and List of Marjan Sarec (Lista Marjana Šarca - LMS) so far leaving the Left party without any political gains. (www.reporter.si)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Although Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability, the minority Government of Marjan Sarec has entered in a period of fragile balance due to the Left party announcement that it will re-assessed its support towards the ruling coalition. 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 it is assessed that none of the ruling coalition parties wish snap elections, however political developments in mid-July could not be excluded. Sarec has been proved of being flexible in Slovenia’s politics so far achieving to balance adequately between*

*different political trends. Looking in the future and next parliamentary elections he seeks to unify political forces belong to the ALDE family against SDS which keeps on being the most powerful political force in the country. The Government has to address several internal social issues (increase of minimum wage, health care, pensions etc). Announcement that 2020 and 2021 state budget will be focused on healthcare and pensions shows that current Government seeks to strengthen social care structures of Slovenia. Border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia remains active with low scale skirmishes not excluded periodically. Slovenia implies that the ongoing border dispute may affect its decision regarding Croatia's membership candidacy in Schengen Zone. Announcement of the EU Court that Slovenia's complaint against Croatia will be heard on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 will add another chapter on the two countries dispute. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed military force to support Police tasks. Announcement of the Italian Minister of Interior that he plans to build a fence in the Italian – Slovenian borders has brought several reactions. 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:** July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Chinese Government has officially invited a Turkish delegation to the Xinjiang region to observe the situation of the native Turkic Uighur people, Communications Director Fahrettin Altun said in social media late Wednesday. “As the official invitee of the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited the country on July 2. The two leaders have therefore met for the third time in a month,” Altun added, further stating that the leaders discussed trade, bilateral relations, investments, research and development, civil aviation, tourism and culture. “The leaders have decided to speed up Turkey's Middle Corridor project and China's Belt and Road Initiative, which will lead to the strengthening of the connection between the western and eastern gates of the Historical Silk Road. All facets of the bilateral relations between the two countries have been discussed in the talks. Erdogan conveyed to his counterpart it is Turkey's sole expectation that Uighurs live in peace, prosperity and welfare; also stating his views and expectations on that matter,” Altun said. Turkey has in the past called on China to respect the fundamental rights of Uighur Turks and to shut down concentration camps. China is under fire from Governments and human rights watchdogs who accuse the Chinese Government of arbitrarily arresting more than 1 million Uighurs, torturing and political brainwashing them in concentration centers and prisons. China's western Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region is home to around 10 million Uighurs. The Turkic Muslim group, which makes up around 45% of Xinjiang's population, has long accused China's authorities of cultural, religious



and economic discrimination. Erdogan was in Beijing Tuesday on an official visit, during which he met with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping to weigh in on mutual issues concerning the two countries and exchange views on ways to further strengthen economic and political ties. Erdogan's visit came after the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan, held over the weekend, which he followed by paying an official visit to Japan on Monday, during which he held productive meetings with his fellow world leaders. (www.dailysabah.com)

- July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Trump administration still plans to impose sanctions on Turkey and remove it from a critical fighter jet program if the NATO ally acquires Russian air defense missile system S-400, despite the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan assurances to the contrary. After meeting US President Donald Trump at the G20 summit in Japan over the weekend, Erdogan said Ankara would be spared the sanctions once S-400 starts arriving in Turkey in coming days. Trump appeared sympathetic to Erdogan at the talks and reluctant to publicly commit to sanctions despite being repeatedly asked by reporters. But US Government officials told Reuters news agency that, at least so far, the administration intends to impose sanctions on Turkey and pull it from the F-35 fighter jet program if it takes delivery of the Russian S-400 system as expected. *"The United States has consistently and clearly stated that Turkey will face very real and negative consequences if it proceeds with its S-400 acquisition, including suspension of procurement and industrial participation in the F-35 program and exposure to sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA),"* a State Department Spokesperson

said. At the Pentagon, Spokesperson Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Mike Andrews said *"Nothing has changed. Turkey's purchase of the Russian S-400 air and missile defense system is incompatible with the F-35 program. Turkey will not be permitted to have both systems."* If the US removes Turkey from the F-35 program and imposes sanctions, it would be one of the most significant ruptures in the recent history of the relationship between the two nations. Trump, who has shown a rapport with Erdogan, could still try to change course by seeking to issue a waiver and postpone sanctions. Such a move would please Ankara but upset some of Trump's allies in Congress. Speaking in Japan last week, Trump blamed former President Barack Obama's administration for failing to help Turkey acquire a US alternative to the S-400s system - Patriot missiles made by The Raytheon Company He said Erdogan was not at fault. *"He got treated very unfairly,"* Trump said. Even minor US sanctions could prompt another sharp sell-off in the Turkish lira. A 30% slide in the currency drove the economy into recession last year, and the lira has lost another 10% this year. On Monday, hard-hit Turkish financial assets jumped after Erdogan's latest upbeat remarks. But a Trump decision to withhold or delay sanctions would be less difficult than backtracking on US threats to kick Turkey out of the F-35 program, experts said. Republicans and Democrats in Congress are broadly opposed to allowing Turkey to have both systems. To show it is serious, Washington has already started the process of removing Turkey from the F-35 program. It has halted training of Turkish pilots in the US on the aircraft and refused to accept any others. Some experts believe Trump could try to change course,



potentially using a last-minute deal on Patriots as a way of saving face for him and Erdogan. (www.aljazeera.com)

- July 5<sup>th</sup>, Ankara called on Moscow to contain the Bashar Assad regime and stop them from attacking civilians and Turkish observation posts in northwestern Syria's Idlib, which Turkey regards as a move risking the de-escalation process. Speaking at a TV interview, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed the issue with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Tokyo. *“At that point, Russia has the responsibility to constrain the regime to cease attacks. We informed them regarding attacks on hospitals, schools and civilian areas,”* Cavusoglu said. The Sochi agreement was reached on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018 between Turkey and Russia. According to the agreement, the cease-fire in the Idlib region will be preserved, with the withdrawal of heavy arms and radicals from the region. Following eight months of relative calm provided by the deal, the Syrian regime intensified its attacks as of April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019 under the pretext of fighting Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militants holed up in Idlib. Stressing that Russia has some concerns regarding the safety of its bases in western Syria, Cavusoglu said military and intelligence officers of the two countries have been in cooperation to handle the existence of radical groups in Idlib and the issue will be solved in cooperation with Russia and Iran. Speaking on the recent situation in Libya and renegade Khalifa Haftar's hostile actions against Turkey, Cavusoglu defined Haftar's acts as *“piracy and banditry”* adding that recent attack on a migrant center in Tripoli proved that the self-

proclaimed General has no humanitarian concern. An airstrike hit a detention center for migrants in the Libyan capital early Wednesday, killing at least 44 people and wounding 130, U.N. officials said. Cavusoglu said that Libya's Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), headed by Prime Minister Faiz al-Sarraj, have been showing efforts to unite the country and willing to share the power, while Haftar, backed by some regional countries such as Egypt and United Arab Emirates, does not intend to recognize the GNA. While Libya is dragged into chaos after the overthrow of Moammar Gadhafi, who ruled Libya with an iron fist for 42 years until the February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011 revolution, Haftar, a former Gadhafi officer, has been trying to destroy the Tripoli-based, internationally recognized GNA for months. His militia launched an offensive in April against the Tripoli-based Government, seeking to capture Tripoli from the GNA but has so far been unsuccessful. (www.dailysabah.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Turkish – US relations remain on a low level. The US administration has threatened Turkey with hard economic sanctions including suspension of Turkish participation in all defense projects; such a move would be devastating for Turkish defense companies. Deliveries of Russian air defense system S-400 is expected to begin in mid-July. However, taking into consideration that Turkey is a pivotal country enjoying geopolitical importance and having one of the largest militaries (the 2<sup>nd</sup> within NATO) it is hard to assess that the US seek a full rift with its NATO ally. On the contrary, there are still open official and unofficial channels of communication*

working on a mutual accepted compromise. The US needs Turkey and the opposite, especially in a period where Middle East is in turbulence. In this context, President Trump appeared almost regretful for the previous US administration (President Obama era) not allowed Turkey to buy the US Patriot missiles. 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. 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. EC Progress Report on Turkey was disappointing “freezing” any further development regarding its accession process. 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 has reinforced 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. Operation “Claw” against PKK in north Iraq continues. 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 escalates tension by sending a 2<sup>nd</sup> drillship (Yavuz) accompanied by Turkish Navy frigates. Production-sharing deal for the Aphrodite gas reservoir worth over 9 billion dollars over 18 years between Cypriot administration and Noble Energy excluding Turkish Cypriots from any profit it is assessed that it will lead in rapid escalation. Turkey is determined to react even with violence if its interests are harmed. The cost so far, for Turkey, is zero achieving simultaneously to question Cypriot sovereign rights. Although the EU presented a joint declaration condemning Turkish actions and underlying that it will consider appropriate action against Turkey if does not stop an illegal gas drilling bid in Cypriot EEZ, international reactions still are limited in words. In this context, Turkey strengthened its diplomatic efforts to convince international community for its fair rights in the maritime region. It is assessed that Turkey is fully determined to escalate tension in the region including armed violence (if it is necessary) aiming at securing its interests. Taking into consideration that Cyprus and Greece act in coordination and the latter guarantees defense and security of Cyprus it cannot be excluded an accidental or pre-planned “hot incident” in Cyprus or the Aegean Sea.


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**NOTE**

 Stable situation. No security risk.

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.

 Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions. 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.