



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: April 20th, the Prime Minister Edi Rama accused President Ilir Meta and opposition MP Sali Berisha of allegedly attempting (again) to destabilize Albania, following their alleged failure to stage a coup d'etat by agitating air traffic controllers to enter a strike earlier this month. (www.exit.al)

- April 21st, the EU will deploy 50 teams to observe elections in Albania on April 25th, 2021 in support of the OSCE/ODIHR mission, which will monitor elections throughout Albania. (www.exit.al)

- April 21st, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan inaugurated a new regional hospital built by Turkey in Fier. It came three months following Erdogan's promise to Rama to have the hospital completed before the April 25th, 2021 elections in Albania. (www.exit.al)



The new hospital (Memorial Regional Hospital)
in Fier

(Photo source: www.kryeministria.al)

- April 25th, Parliamentary elections were held today in Albania. Voters turned out in record numbers, surpassing those who voted in both the 2013 and 2017 general elections. Elections were calm with few reports of voter intimidation and

ballot photographing, while a number of individuals were escorted by the police. (www.exit.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Tension was increased last week before the elections including a deadly armed incident. However, elections were calm without major incidents and violence. Accusations of vote buying and the scandal of leak of personal data of 910,000 people used by the ruling Socialist party have overshadowed the elections. It is notable the direct interference of the US Embassy in the Albanian political affairs with persisting requests, orders and influence. Albania is considered by a lot of experts as a "captured state" namely the Government has established a mechanism which puts public affairs in the service of specific interests of state's top officials. The country suffers from corruption, money laundering and links between politicians, businessmen and organized crime. Needless to say that Albania has been evolved into a European hub of drug smuggling and human trafficking. In the geopolitical field, Albania has developed very close relations with Turkey. Albanian economic dependence from Turkey is steadily increased. In short, Turkey exercises significant influence in Albania through direct investments, donations, military cooperation and cultural projects.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

April 20th, the Chairman of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency and leader of the ruling party in the country's Republika Srpska (RS) entity, Milorad Dodik, said that the entity Parliament will be forming a team that would negotiate with representatives of the country's other semi-

autonomous entity, the Federation (FBiH), how BiH should be structured in order to make it more functional. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- April 20th, the Commission for Cooperation with the NATO unanimously adopted the draft document Reform Program for 2021; a political and legal document that defines cooperation between BiH and NATO on an annual basis. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- April 22nd, the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina expressed its concern on media allegations that the Republika Srpska's Interior Ministry is planning to purchase military-class heavy weapons for its Police forces asking for a public and transparent explanation in "what is the security threat that would justify the use of such deadly weapon." (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Bosnia was involved last week in a non-paper case which according to media reports advocates the redraw of Balkan borders and more specifically the dissolution of the country with its current structure. Although it is not still clear if the Slovenian Prime Minister, Janez Jansa has issued this non-paper, there were strong political reactions from Bosnian political forces. The (alleged) non-paper proposes unification of Republika Srpska to Serbia, Kosovo to Albania and a special autonomous status for Croatian territories in Bosnia. Bosniak (Muslim Bosnians) politicians rejected such ideas as dangerous for regional peace and stability. On the other hand, leader of Bosnian Serbs, Milorad Dodik stated – as usual – that he is in favor of Republika Srpska's peaceful secession. Such "leaks" strengthen nationalistic rhetoric in Bosnia which

is vulnerable in ethnic division and hatred. Potential redraw of borders in the Balkans is awakening memories of the 1992 – 1995 Yugoslav war. There is no doubt that the Dayton Peace Agreement terminated the bloodshed, but it is time to be reviewed towards a more functional decision-making system and a more functional state. Bosnia has become a field of rivalry between the US (and EU) and Russia. Taking into consideration that Bosnia is not an EU and NATO member state, one could understand the reason that Bosnia has been targeted by Moscow. In other words there is fertile soil for influence activity towards the country. Experts do not exclude attempts of destabilization of the country by the Russian factor. Under current situation the US may push Bosnia for rapid progress regarding the country's NATO accession. Croatia and Serbia continue to treat Bosnia as their protectorate interfering in its internal affairs. Bosnia is far from joining the EU since the country suffers from corruption, absence of rule of law, difficulties in respect of human rights, weak public administration, democratic deficit and its economic performance is one of the lowest in Europe.



BULGARIA: April 20th, Bulgaria's Ambassador in Moscow, Atanas Krastin, was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry to be handed a note concerning the declaration of two employees of the Bulgarian Embassy in the Russian capital as persona non grata, the Russian Foreign Ministry said. According to the Ministry, that step was a response "to the decision by Bulgarian authorities, motivated by nothing, to declare two members of staff at the Russian

Embassy in Sofia as persona non grata.”
(www.sofiaglobe.com)

- April 23rd, outgoing Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borissov's Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Grazhdani za Evropeysko Razvitie na Bulgariya – GERB) - Union of Democratic Forces (Sayuz na Demokratichnite Sili – SDS) coalition – winner of the largest share of votes in the April 4th parliamentary elections – handed the mandate to form a Government back to the President Roumen Radev. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The winner of the April 4th, 2021 parliamentary elections, GERB returned the mandate for forming the new Government given by the President Rumen Radev. Radev will hand over a new mandate in the elections' surprise “There is Such a People” (ITN) party which has not unveil its political intentions yet. It is rather unlikely ITN to form a Government and it is very possible the country to face new elections. There is a realistic possibility of an experts Government or a caretaker one (GERB, BSP and DPS wish). However, a new election is the most possible scenario since ITN will try to capitalize its electoral dynamic increasing its power. Consequently Bulgaria is entering into political instability and uncertainty. Bulgaria – North Macedonia relations remain tense due to Sofia's decision to block Skopje progress of accession negotiations. Tension is recorded between Moscow and Sofia with mutual expulsions of diplomats due to alleged espionage cases of Russia against Bulgaria. The latter had traditionally close relations with Moscow and there is still a remarkable number of Bulgarians who see positively a strong relation with Russia.

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



CROATIA: April 21st, the Foreign Ministers of Slovenia, Croatia and Italy signed a joint statement on the protection of the northern Adriatic in Brdo pri Kranju, after talks on joint cooperation in this area. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- April 21st, the biggest opposition party, the Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske - SDP), announced plans to force a vote of no-confidence to the Health Minister, citing corruption and a bungled coronavirus response as the reason. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- April 23rd, Parliament has approved an outline of the Government's National Recovery Plan, which includes projects that will be financed with 6.5 billion Euros in EU funds. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Opposition is promoting an initiative to file a motion of no-confidence against the Health Minister, Vili Beros claiming that not only he failed to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, but he is involved in corruption scandals. It is the first initiative of the opposition to question the Government, but with zero chances of success. It is assessed that the opposition is raising its voice due to the coming local elections scheduled for May 16th, 2021. The country continues to interfere

in Bosnian affairs seeking to promote its national interests. Main Croatian task is to achieve the amendment of Bosnian electoral law securing the equal election of Bosnian Croats in state's institutions. Accession in the Schengen Zone and Eurozone is a strategic goal since it will benefit the state regarding economy, trade, and security. Illegal migration in borders with Bosnia remains a major problem for the country, despite the significant reduce of migrants last two months. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: April 23rd, the House of Representatives was dissolved on April 23rd due to the Cypriot parliamentary elections scheduled to take place on May 30th, 2021. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- April 23rd, the President Nicos Anastasiades informed the National Council for the preparations ahead of the informal conference on Cyprus, scheduled to take place in Geneva on April 27th – 29th, 2021. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Cypriot administration is in the final stage of preparations for the 5+1 informal meeting on the Cypriot question scheduled for April 27th – 29th, 2021. In this context the Cypriot President, Nikos Anastasiades has informed the party leaders for the adopted strategy in the coming talks. It should be highlighted that the president will be accompanied in Geneva by the leaders of the parliamentary opposition. Moreover, Anastasiades traveled to Greece where he was met with the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos

Mitsotakis seeking to coordinate Cyprus – Greece stance in Geneva talks. However, it seems that talks have failed before even get started. Cyprus advocates the solution of a bicomunal – bizonal federation with decentralized competencies for the federal parts, while the Turkish Cypriot community supports the idea of two independent and sovereign states. If Turkish Cypriot community and Turkey insist on supporting such idea in Geneva talks will reach a stalemate before even starts. However, it is not still clear if the Turkish side is committed in the two states solution or it is just a matter of negotiation tactic aiming to put pressure on Cyprus. The country is moving towards parliamentary elections scheduled for May 30th, 2021 and the Parliament was dissolved last week. Cyprus is strengthening its relations with regional states following a foreign policy of multilateral cooperation in several fields. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize). As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: April 19th, Greece is seeking to maintain open channels of communication with Turkey, despite of the Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias' public confrontation with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu during their joint press conference in Ankara on Thursday. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 19th, Israel and Greece have signed their biggest ever defense procurement deal, which Israel said would strengthen political and economic ties between the countries. The

agreement includes a 1.65 billion dollars contract for the establishment and operation of a training center for the Hellenic Air Force by Israeli defense contractor ELBIT SYSTEMS over a 22-year period, Israel's Defense Ministry said. (www.ekathimerini.com)



Greek and Israeli officials sign the bilateral defense agreement

(Photo source: www.mod.mil.gr)

- April 20th, Greece and Saudi Arabia have signed a deal to lend a Patriot air defense system to the Arab country to protect critical energy facilities, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias announced. (www.reuters.com)

- April 22nd, the Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis shared his view that a meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will take place in the near future, in an interview with Greek TV channel Alpha on Thursday. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 22nd, the 10-day "INIOCHOS-2021" multinational military exercise took place between April 12th to April 22nd, 2021 across the Athens Flight Information Region (FIR), with the participation of the Armed Forces of Greece (all types of fighter jets, Navy vessels, attack helicopters, infantry and armor divisions etc),

France (RAFALE and MIRAGE 2000 jets), US (F-16 jets, MQ-9 UAVs, KC-135 refuelling aircraft), Israel (F-15 and F-16 jets), UAE (F-16 jets), Spain (F-18 jets), Cyprus (AW-139 helicopters) and Canada (Air Weapon managers). (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 23rd, Greece's Council of State rejected on Friday a request to annul a decision to transfer convicted terrorist Dimitris Koufodinas to Domokos Prison in central Greece. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

Greek Government is downgrading the public confrontation between its Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias and his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu two weeks ago in Turkey, by announcing in top level (prime Minister, Foreign Minister etc) that Greece is seeking to reach common ground with Turkey. Although the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis supported Dendias in his strong reaction towards Turkey and Cavusoglu, it is not still confirmed that the Foreign Minister followed Mitsotakis directions. It is assessed that the positive (almost enthusiastic) response of the Greek people in Dendias stance forced Mitsotakis to back his Minister. Greece keeps strengthening its external balance as a countermeasure in the Turkish provocative and aggressive behavior. In this context, Athens and Tel-Aviv signed a significant defense agreement on establishing a modern air force training center in Greece. Moreover, Greece signed an agreement with Saudi Arabia to deploy an anti-aircraft/missile PATRIOT battery in the latter's territory for providing superior air defense. This agreement has special importance as it confirms that Greece is building strong

relations in the wider region not only in the diplomatic level but also in the military one. Taking into consideration that Athens strongly avoided in the near past to deploy military forces in other countries this agreement could be considered as a major turning point in Greek foreign policy. Finally, the international military exercise “INIOCHOS-2021” strengthened not only military cooperation between Greece and countries such as the US, France, Israel, UAE, Canada and Cyprus, but also Greece’s image as a reliable, effective and strong regional actor. Following the conclusions of the last summer crisis between Athens and Ankara in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean Sea Greece implements an ambitious project for strengthening the Armed Forces seeking to modernize the Navy and Air Force power by purchasing new frigates and fighter jets. The country needs not only to maintain balance of power in the region, but to achieve air and naval superiority for protecting the Greek vital interests. The country enjoys political stability and the Government enjoys acceptance among citizens.



KOSOVO: April 21st, the Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti will visit Brussels next week to meet the EU top officials, but not Serbia’s President Aleksandar Vucic, who is also due to the EU capital. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo’s new Prime Minister is going to visit Brussels next week where he will meet with EU officials but not with Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic. Despite the fact that the two leaders (Kurti and Vucic) will not meet it is clear

that Brussels push both men and especially Kurti to restart dialogue. It is not a secret that Kurti is not very keen on talks with Belgrade but international actors namely the EU and US have their ways to make clear their priorities. However, it is not expected tangible results after Kurti’s meetings with EU officials. Organized crime, corruption, money laundering, weak public administration, absence of rule of law, controlled justice, transactions between politicians and criminals are persistent “open sores” for Kosovo.



MOLDOVA: April 19th, the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) demands that the President Maia Sandu should resign and snap presidential elections should be held due to the Constitutional Court’s judgment to dissolve the Parliament ignoring the existence of a parliamentary majority that proposed Vladimir Golovatiuc for Prime Minister. (www.ipn.md)

- April 23rd, the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) and the parliamentary platform For Moldova (Pro Moldova), which includes the Shor Party (Partidul ȘOR) adopted a statement on the usurpation of power by the Constitutional Court (CC) by which three of the CC judges are given a vote of no confidence. (www.ipn.md)

- April 23rd, the legislative body adopted a decision on the appointment of Boris Lupascu as the Constitutional Court judge for a six year term. (www.ipn.md)

- April 23rd, President Maia Sandu said that an unprecedented attack on constitutional order and

on the independence of the Constitutional Court was witnessed today. In the meeting of the Supreme Security Council, Sandu asked the heads of the law enforcement agencies to not allow any involvement in anti-constitutional actions and to not fulfill illegal orders. She also requested the Prosecutor General's Office to investigate the accusation of usurpation of state power and attack against law and order by the parliamentary forces which adopted the statement against the Constitutional Court and voted for judge changes, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political crisis in Moldova is getting worse since now is turning into constitutional (and institutional). Both sides are determined to risk the state's stability and cohesion in the sake of their political interests. The newly elected President, Maia Sandu and the outgoing one, Igor Dodon carry full responsibility of current crisis in the country which could bring detrimental effects in Moldovan citizens. Sandu is responsible for pushing state's institutions to move on the edge of constitutional order for toppling PSRM from power, while Dodon is responsible for questioning Constitutional Court's decisions; the ultimate guarantor of the state's Constitution. Parliamentary majority was ostentatiously ignored by Sandu and consequently the majority coalition reacted. However, Parliament's resolution to accuse Constitutional Court for usurpation of power and to name new Constitutional Judges has escalated tension in the country. Under current circumstances compromise is needed between the rival political forces in the sake of Moldovan people. Snap elections is closer than ever (Sandu's strategic

victory), but it is not certain when they are going to take place. The country remains vulnerable and unstable amid a health crisis and a seriously damaged economy. The west namely the EU, US and NATO strongly support political change in the country favoring the pro-western PAS as the leading force, while Russia is seeking to maintain current political balance (PSRM) which favors its political plans. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: April 19th,

France has shown willingness to find a way for helping Montenegro to repay its debt to China. As of today, Foreign Minister Djordje Radulovic is on a several-day working visit to France. Earlier, Montenegrin Deputy Prime Minister Dritan Abazovic asked the EU for help in repaying the debt to China. After that, Montenegrin Eurobonds fell sharply. (www.cdm.com)

- April 21st, proposed dismissal of Minister of Justice, Human and Minority Rights Vladimir Lepsavic because he denied the Srebrenica crime in the Montenegrin Parliament will be discussed when formal and political conditions are created, Parliament sources told Dnevne Novine. (www.cdm.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Government of Montenegro is negotiating with the EU for a solution on the state's debt to China. Negotiation is hard with several political (and geopolitical) aspects. The economic burden of the Chinese loan is unbearable setting the state "hostage" of Beijing. The EU is forced to support Montenegro aiming to limit the Chinese influence

in the Balkans. Moreover, the Montenegrin debt to China is a good reason for the EU to push the pro-Russian/pro-Serbian Government of Montenegro for political compromise. Certain internal and external stakeholders work on destabilizing the Government. It is a fact that the Justice Minister Vladimir Leposavic's case has put the ruling coalition in a difficult situation, but it is assessed that the Government remains coherent and stable. The EU and US consider the Montenegrin ruling coalition as pro-Russian setting a threat for the Southeastern Europe political and security stability. Montenegro needs concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Montenegro is closer to the EU accession than any other Western Balkan country but current political situation puts at risk its European future.



NORTH MACEDONIA: April 24th, historian Dragi Gjorgiev, who leads the North Macedonia's team in the joint commission with Bulgaria, stated that there was no progress at the latest meeting. (www.republika.mk)

- April 25th, thousands of opposition supporters have protested in North Macedonia's capital of Skopje demanding retrials and freedom for more than a dozen former conservative Government officials convicted for their roles in a mob invasion of Parliament in 2017. Protesters then marched peacefully from the Government offices to the Parliament building to demand the resignation of the left-wing cabinet and an early election. (www.aljazeera.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Tension in Bulgaria – North Macedonia relations remains since the two countries cannot compromise and reach an agreement on their disputed issues. Under current circumstances, it is likely Sofia to maintain its blockade of the North Macedonia's accession to the EU. Although Zoran Zaev's Government is stable, the EU accession process setbacks and potential inter-party rivals (with the SDSM congress ahead) could create problems to the ruling coalition. Opposition VMRO-DPMNE strengthens its voice asking for resignation of the Government and snap elections. Corruption reigns in the country, while the establishment of rule of law is another challenge for the state. The Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev enjoys a fragile majority in the Parliament and his cabinet is rather unstable and vulnerable to political blackmail.



ROMANIA: April 21st, after almost a week from Vlad Voiculescu's dismissal as the Health Minister position and following two rounds of negotiations, prerequisite and ultimatums, National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL), Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR) - Party of Liberty, Unity and Solidarity (Partidul Libertate, Unitate și Solidaritate - PLUS) coalition and Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR) have reached an agreement on Tuesday night. The leaders of the three parties have signed "an addendum" to the coalition protocol, announcing that the new Health Minister will be nominated on Wednesday. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- April 22nd, President Klaus Iohannis said that Romania is calling for “increased attention” from NATO to the Black Sea area adding that the area needs NATO and European co-operation, and “increased attention from all to the eastern flank.” Iohannis announced that a meeting of the Supreme Council for National Defense (CSAT) will be convened next week to discuss the situation in the Black Sea area. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- April 23rd, the Romania – Poland - Turkey trilateral is working very well, and its relevance has significantly increased, contributing in its 9 years of existence to strengthening the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO), Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu told the plenary session of the trilateral summit, also attended by his Polish and Turkish counterparts Zbigniew Rau and Mevlut Cavuoglu. The three Foreign Ministers signed, in a first for this format, a Joint Statement. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

It seems that internal crisis within the ruling coalition has been resolved following negotiations between the constituent parties and an additional agreement. What actually was agreed is that none of the partners, the Prime Minister included, will receive major political decisions (such as the dismissal of the Health Minister, Vlad Voiculescu) unilaterally, without talk and consensus. Stability and cohesion of the ruling coalition preserved and the Government continues its work in a rather challenging time for the country. Romania enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. This assessment is strengthened due to the latest deployment of

Russian troops in the eastern border of Ukraine which escalates tension in the wider region of Black Sea. Convocation of the Supreme Council of National Defense shows that Romania is worrying from current situation in its neighborhood and pays special attention in any further escalation. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO.



SERBIA: April 20th, the Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic has downgraded the case of the alleged non-paper about the change of borders in the Western Balkans. Vucic dismissed speculations about any swap of territories or change of borders in the Western Balkans. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 21st, Serbian Parliament Speaker Ivica Dacic said that talks with the political parties that do not want European Parliament mediation in the inter-party dialogue on election conditions has been scheduled for April 28th, 2021. (www.rs.n1info.com)



Serbian Parliament Speaker, Ivica Dacic
(Photo source: www.parlament.rs)

- April 23rd, Aleksandar Vucic, Serbia's President, told Heiko Mass, German Foreign Minister that Belgrade was ready to continue dialogue with Pristina on the normalization of relations and that it would be constructive in searching for a compromise. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 23rd, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said that an agreement had been reached with the Serbian authorities on policies and reforms which would be supported by a new Policy Coordination Instrument (PCI) through 2023. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 25th, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Serbia Lieutenant General Milan Mojsilovic said that serving mandatory military service in the conditions of military neutrality is a long-term solution that would satisfy the needs of a peacetime and wartime Army, adding that this is his personal opinion and the stance of the General Staff. Mojsilovic also announced that the Armed Forces will hold a joint military exercise with the Armed Forces of the USA in September, as well as a trilateral exercise "Slovene brotherhood" with the Armed Forces of Russia and Belarus, and a bilateral exercise "Aviator brotherhood of Russia and Serbia – BARS." (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Serbian ruling coalition announced the beginning of inter-party dialogue with the opposition which does not wish the mediation of European Parliament in the process on April 28th, 2021. It should be noted that there is also a second dialogue process under the European Parliament mediation where different opposition parties join it. The President Aleksandar Vucic and the ruling

coalition try to deconstruct the role of the foreign factor in the inter-party dialogue in Serbia avoiding unpleasant changes in state's internal politics (electoral law, media freedom etc). Opposition plans protests if dialogue fails aiming to destabilize the ruling coalition. The Serbian process towards the EU has stuck due to political reasons and this brings Belgrade closer to Moscow and Beijing. Serbia is the closest and most loyal partner of Russia in Southeast Europe. Belgrade appears ready and committed in dialogue with Kosovo for the latter's status, but the process is in Kosovo's new Prime Minister, Albin Kurti hands, who appears reluctant with the negotiation process. The President Aleksandar Vucic rejected the leaks of land swap namely Kosovo for Republika Srpska claiming that Serbia is not interested in such games. Corruption, organized crime, public administration accountability, media freedom are the main internal challenges for the country. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.



SLOVENIA: April 20th, President Borut Pahor received the annual report on the preparedness of the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) in which the SAF General Staff assessed the force's preparedness in 2020 was good for peace time, but insufficient for war operations. (www.sta.si)

- April 22nd, the Government amended on Wednesday the medium-term defense program until 2023 to adjust it to the latest priorities in development of military capabilities. Procedures

to buy a tactical transport aircraft and two medium-sized transport helicopters are expected to be completed by then. The Government said that “*deterioration of the global security situation, increased participation of the Slovenian Army in crisis response operations and their increased geographical remoteness, there is a greater need for own air transport capabilities.*” (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █:

The minority Government of Janez Jansa enjoys fragile stability. The upgraded annual report on operational situation of the Slovenian Armed Forces confirmed once a year again that they are incapable for war operations; a major problem for the state’s defense and security capacity. The state pays special attention in upgrading the Armed Forces capabilities and in this context has approved a 780 million Euros armament project aiming to modernize them. Procurement of transport aircrafts and helicopters has been set as a priority.



TURKEY: April 20th, ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) lawmakers in Turkey are set to propose the establishment of a parliamentary friendship group with Egypt, said a senior AKP legislator. (www.dailysabah.com)

- April 21st, Turkey has postponed a much-anticipated Afghan peace conference in Istanbul until the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The international conference, deemed essential for the war-torn country’s future amid escalating violence, was scheduled to be held from April 24th until May 4th, 2021. The Taliban had earlier refused to attend any Afghan peace

summit until all foreign forces were pulled out of Afghanistan. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 21st, Turkey replaced the country’s Trade Minister, Ruhsar Pekcan by Mehmet Mus. Moreover, appointed two Ministers to newly established Ministries early Wednesday, the Official Gazette announced. Derya Yanik and Vedat Bilgin were appointed as Ministers of the Family and Social Services Ministry and Labor and Social Security Ministry, respectively. (www.aa.com.tr)

- April 22nd, Turkey will continue to carefully abide by the decades-old international pact governing the Istanbul Straits leading into the Black Sea, said the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu. (www.aa.com.tr)

- April 24th, the US President Joe Biden has formally recognized the mass killing of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during World War I as “*genocide*,” a move that was immediately rejected by Turkey. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 25th, Turkey’s Foreign Ministry has summoned the US Ambassador in Ankara to protest the decision by the US President Joe Biden to mark the deportation and killing of Armenians during the Ottoman Empire as “*genocide*.” Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat Onal met with David Satterfield on Saturday to express Ankara’s strong condemnation. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 25th, a ground and air operation launched late Friday against terrorists in northern Iraq aims to eliminate the terror threat along Turkey’s southern borders, said the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. (www.aa.com.tr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ankara is implementing an active, multilateral external policy seeking to establish a leading role in regional affairs. Lately, it is working in warming up frozen relations with several countries in an effort to strengthen its external balance. In this context, Turkey approaches Egypt aiming to re-establish its diplomatic and political relations which had violently interrupted back in 2013 when the Egyptian Army overturned the then elected President Mohamed Morsi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. Cairo is a necessary “ally” for Ankara in order to promote its strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Turkey has undertaken an active role as a mediator in peace talks for Afghanistan but currently the plan has collapsed as Taliban refused to take part in. Ankara is seeking to fill in the gap has emerged after the announcement of withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan and to increase its influence in that country. It is alarming that Turkey keeps on informing international community for potential flows of Afghani refugees after withdrawal of western forces and a possible political and security chaos in Afghanistan. Recognition of Armenian genocide by the US it was “a hard slap in the face” of Turkey causing fury in Ankara. Recognition by the US President has a strong symbolic message convicting Turkey in the eyes of international community as a criminal against humanity; more specific a criminal against Armenian people. Although recognition of Armenian genocide by the US will be a ‘thorn’ in the Ankara – Washington relations, it is assessed that the two state’s will always maintain open channels of communication and cooperation. It is not a secret that bilateral relations are not


harmonic, but Turkey and US are still allies and share common interests; they need each other. The PKK militants consist a permanent threat of Turkish security. Thus, the Turkish Armed Forces launch military operations not only in the Turkish territory, but also in the Iraqi one seeking to eliminate their bases. Turkish authorities continue to violate human rights, media freedom and democratic rule. Arrests of political opponents, journalists who criticize the ruling AKP and political activists is a common practice. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Turkey could not be considered as a democracy but rather as a “hybrid democracy” since the President adopts authoritarian practices.


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NOTE

 Stable situation. No security risk.

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.

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

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

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