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**Hermes Institute of  
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**SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE**

**AT A GLANCE**



**SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE**

***PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE TO THOSE WHO SHAPE THE FUTURE***

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

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

#### **“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE**

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**ALBANIA:** August 18<sup>th</sup>, Turkish citizen Selami Simsek, who is accused by Turkish authorities of being a supporter of the Gulenist movement, and is wanted in Turkey, has turned to the National Committee on Asylum and Refugees in a bid to strike down the Albanian Government's decision to reject his asylum request. On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 Albanian authorities refused Simsek's asylum request. (www.exit.al)

- August 19<sup>th</sup>, OSCE proposal to mediate in current Belarusian crisis was praised by the European Council which expressed its support in the initiative. Currently, Albania holds the presidency of OSCE. (www.exit.al)

- August 22<sup>nd</sup>, Construction of 524 apartments has started in Lac by a Turkish company funded by the Turkish Government after an agreement signed between the Governments of Albania and Turkey. New apartments will be donated to families which have lost their houses during the November 2019 earthquake in Albania. (www.exit.al)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Political abnormality continues in Albania. Parliament's democratic order is questioned due to resignation of opposition MPs and establishment of a new parliamentary opposition which actually does not express the will of opposition parties. In other words, Albania has the parliamentary opposition and the extra-parliamentary opposition. Besides, Albanian Government of Edi Rama faces allegations for oppressing media freedom, and human rights and challenging democratic values. Constitutional and electoral reforms are still ongoing while wider consensus is still a disputable question. Albania's European path is not smooth but there is a lot of work should be done. Alt-*

*hough Albania received last March the green light for the opening of accession negotiations by the EU, the first intergovernmental conference which signals the beginning of the process is doubtful due to Albanian inconsistency in fast forwarding reforms. Corruption, organized crime (and especially links of state's politics with organized crime), money laundering and smuggling remain as "open sores" for the country. Judicial independence is seriously questioned in Albania since it is assessed that it is tooled by the Government.*



## BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

August 17<sup>th</sup>, according to the Bosnian Security Minister, Selmo Cikotic the country faces several security challenges and threats. Of course the most significant are illegal migration and the COVID-19 pandemic but there are several other. "There are certain political concepts that challenge functionality of the state and its institutions in BiH, as well as international subjectivity, the need to harmonize interethnic relations, and caring for only one ethnic group, which leads to instability that de-motivates young people in BiH," the Minister said. Moreover, he claimed that organized crime and corruption, illegal human trafficking, weapon and narcotics trafficking, are additional threats that disrupt stability and security of Bosnia in the long run. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- August 20<sup>th</sup>, Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik said that Republika Srpska (RS) will continue to push illegal migrants out of the entity's territory refusing to accept the Una-Sana canton decision to ban the entrance of migrants. According to Dodik, migrants who arrested in RS will be transported wherever they want out of the entity's ter-

territory underlining that there will be no reception centers in that entity. Una-Sana Canton is one of ten cantons in the Federation (FBiH), Bosnia's other semi-autonomous entity where all the reception centers for illegal migrants are located. According to the latest cantonal and International Organisation for Migrations estimates, some 7,000 migrants reside in this canton, which is closest to the border with Croatia. (www.ban1info.com)

- August 21<sup>st</sup>, Bosnian Serb leader, Milorad Dodik said that Bosnian Armed Forces will not be deployed along the Bosnian – Serbian borders since “Serbia is our home country.” Earlier, the other member of the tripartite presidency, Zeljko Komsic said that “migrants will stay in the Republika Srpska until the Armed Forces of BiH are engaged on the border with Serbia.” Dodik replied back saying that it is not Komsic business to deal with RS's affairs. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- August 23<sup>rd</sup>, Serbia donated to Republika Srpska (RS) 1,950,000 Euros as assistance for the implementation of cooperation projects within the cooperation mechanism under the Agreement on Establishing Special Parallel Relations between RS and Serbia. The allocated funds will be used for reconstruction projects in education and health sectors. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Illegal migration turns to become the most significant problem of Bosnia bringing tension between entities. Currently, the semi-autonomous canton Una-Sana carries the burden of migrants while Republika Srpska denies accepting them in its territory. Migration problem may become a major*

*factor of instability in the country taking into consideration the fragile coexistence of the state's entities and their interethnic relations. Bosnia continues to suffer from political instability and uncertainty due to complicated Bosnian political system and the state's non-flexible decision-making process. Each entity seeks to serve its own interests ignoring the state's interests leading quite often in political or economic deadlocks. Consequently, Bosnia is far behind other Western Balkan countries towards the EU integration process. It is not a secret that Bosnia faces several political and institutional deadlocks which slow down its economic performances, encourage entities' rivalries and nationalistic rhetoric, and put the country on permanent political instability. Without the pressure of international community (namely the EU and US) and its close presence in Bosnia through the OHR administration Bosnia could have been dissolved (violently or not). Republika Srpska's leaders have openly stated that they are in favor of secession from the Bosnian state. Of course such a scenario could destabilize the whole region of Western Balkans. Bosnia has become a vital field of rivalry between Russia and the West. Moscow estimates that Bosnia is a privileged region of action to establish influence. Taking into consideration that Southeastern Europe is a region fully controlled by the Euro-Atlantic forces only Bosnia and Serbia still offer “fertile soil” for Russian meddling in region's affairs. Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments.*



**BULGARIA:** August 17<sup>th</sup>, ruling Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria

(Grazhdani za Evropeysko Razvitie na Bulgariya – GERB) submitted the draft of a new Constitution to the Parliament. The move came on the 40th consecutive day of protests demanding the resignation of Borissov's Government and of Prosecutor-General Ivan Geshev, and early parliamentary elections. Also on August 17<sup>th</sup>, GERB tabled draft amendments to the Electoral Code. ([www.sofiaglobe.com](http://www.sofiaglobe.com), [www.novinite.com](http://www.novinite.com))

- August 19<sup>th</sup>, about 750 military personnel from the Bulgarian Army and the US Air Force in Europe have been participating in the joint training exercise “Thracian Summer 2020” held in the area of in the area of Cheshnegirovo airfield. ([www.sofiaglobe.com](http://www.sofiaglobe.com))

- August 22<sup>nd</sup>, the international rating agency “Fitch Ratings” has confirmed Bulgaria's long-term credit rating “BBB” with a stable outlook. International experts say that thanks to fiscal stability and the accumulated surplus - the country's economy withstands the pressure caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Bulgaria's entry into the waiting room of the Eurozone and the Banking Union is also reported as a positive fact. ([www.novinite.com](http://www.novinite.com))

- August 22<sup>nd</sup>, anti-government protests continue in Sofia for 44<sup>th</sup> consecutive day with traffic blockades at the three key crossroads in the city remain in place; at Eagles' Bridge; Sofia University and Independence square (outside the Council of Ministers). ([www.novinite.com](http://www.novinite.com))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Ruling GERB tabled to the Parliament its proposal for amending Constitution (and the elec-*

*toral code). Government's move is expected to provoke not only opposition's reaction but the President Rumen Radev's too. Borissov's move is assessed as a political maneuver to gain time which it is likely to escalate tension. It seems that early parliamentary elections are the only solution for the country to reach political stability. It is positive that the Government has avoided using Police violence to stop protesters; another sign that elections are not too far. The President, Rumen Radev has chosen to act more as an opposition political leader rather than the Head of state with a unifying role. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). However, military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.*



**CROATIA:** August 18<sup>th</sup>, Croatia and the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ), strongly support Bosnia & Herzegovina's European path and insist on amending the election law so that Croats in that country can be equal, Foreign Minister Gordan Grlic-Radman said in Bosnian southern city of Mostar on Tuesday, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine – HDZ BiH), HDZ's sister party in Bosnia and Herzegovina. ([www.ba.n1info.com](http://www.ba.n1info.com))

- August 21<sup>st</sup>, Croatia's economy will contract this year, but less than had been originally projected and is expected to begin a strong recovery in 2021, unless something unpredictable happens,

said Croatian National Bank Governor Boris Vujcic in an interview on HRT on Friday. (www.hrt.hr)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Croatia enjoys political stability with a strong Government. Croatia's main concern is economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Croatia – Slovenia border dispute remains active, but COVID-19 pandemic have downsized current situation. Surprisingly, Slovenia appears ready to promote Croatia's accession to the Schengen zone; an issue which Slovenia has threatened to use it for pushing Croatia to implement the arbitration tribunal rule on Piran Bay dispute. Croatia seeks to maintain its influence in neighboring Bosnia through the Croatian entity in that country. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. However, the current COVID-19 pandemic may affect the ambitious modernization plans due the economic repercussions in the country. Croatian Air Force is far from NATO standards and actually the country lacks an operational air power.*



**CYPRUS:** August 19<sup>th</sup>, Cyprus-related issues should not be a footnote in a wider Greek - Turkish dialogue to diffuse the crisis in the eastern Mediterranean, the island's Permanent Representative at the UN and Chief Negotiator Andreas Mavroyiannis said on Wednesday. In an interview with the Cyprus News Agency, Mavroyiannis said Cyprus should maintain its own decisive role in its own issues and the EU must provide support and not bundle everything together. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- August 19<sup>th</sup>, the EU has a responsibility to react to all Turkey's threatening actions in the region, President Nicos Anastasiades said on Wednesday at an unofficial EU Council teleconference. Anastasiades' statements at the teleconference come amid growing unrest in the Eastern Mediterranean with Turkey's violations in Cyprus and Greece's exclusive economic zones (EEZ). He said the EU needs to deal with Turkey in the same manner as Belarus. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- August 19<sup>th</sup>, Cyprus has issued the final building permit for the Egypt - Cyprus electricity interconnection "EUROAFRICA INTERCONNECTOR," it was announced on Wednesday. The permit provides the green light for the construction of the High-Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) converter station, for which SIEMENS has been chosen as the preferred constructor. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- August 20<sup>th</sup>, Turkey is preparing a third drillship that will be dispatched to Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as soon as the necessary support ships are found, reports said on Thursday. The third drillship, "SERTAO," has been renamed "KANOUNI," daily Phileleftheros said and will be supported by two vessels procured by Turkey. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- August 21<sup>st</sup>, Turkish Cypriots are almost ready to begin reopening the town of Varosha, the breakaway state's "premier" said on Friday, a former resort area fenced off and abandoned in no-man's land since a 1974 Turkish invasion that split the island. "Varosha is most definitely going to be opened. The tide has shifted, a new page has been turned," Turkish Cypriot "prime minister" Ersin Tatar said. "It [Northern Cyprus] will be-



come stronger by opening Varosha to tourism,” he added. ([www.cyprus-mail.com](http://www.cyprus-mail.com))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

Cyprus has to tackle increased Turkish aggression due to Turkey's plans for hydrocarbon drills within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Turkish activity in Cyprus is linked with the respective activity in Greek waters which has raised tension in Eastern Mediterranean dramatically. While Greece has deployed its Armed Forces, Cyprus has engaged in a marathon diplomatic campaign to get international support and solidarity. President, Nicos Anastasiades pushes further his EU counterparts got becoming stricter against Turkey seeking to reduce its activity. Despite Cypriot diplomatic efforts, Turkey conducts hydrocarbon drills in Cyprus' waters whenever and wherever it wishes without any substantial countermeasures from Cyprus. Currently, Cyprus coordinates its diplomatic efforts with Greece seeking to convince EU member states to impose sanctions to Turkey; a scenario not very likely. As long as Turkey is isolated from energy cooperation and alliances in the Eastern Mediterranean it would react aggressively seeking to gain an active role in the energy game. Unresolved Cypriot question complicates exploitation of energy resources in the region. France presence in the region is upgraded with naval and air forces. Cyprus lacks aeronautical assets to deter Turkey from its illegal activities. It seeks to balance its military weakness through “external counterbalance” through alliances and strategic cooperation with other countries. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Another significant aggressive act by Turkey and Turkish

Cypriot community which should be closely monitored is the intention of opening of the “ghost” city of Varosha; such an action could undermine any possibilities for dialogue regarding resolution of Cypriot question. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps size) which poses a permanent threat against the Cypriot republic. 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:** August 18<sup>th</sup>, with the Turkish fleet still deployed in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, Athens remained in full operational readiness while at the same time bracing for the expected launch of a new diplomatic rapprochement with Ankara on August 24<sup>th</sup>. If there is no change in Turkey's behavior in the coming days, then Greece, along with Cyprus, will raise the issue of sanctions against Ankara at the informal summit of EU Foreign Ministers on August 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020. ([www.ekathimerini.com](http://www.ekathimerini.com))

- August 19<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister's National Security Adviser, Alexandros Diakopoulos, submitted his resignation on Wednesday evening, after his comments on the activities of the Turkish seismic vessel “ORUC REIS” off Kastellorizo. ([www.ekathimerini.com](http://www.ekathimerini.com))

- August 21<sup>st</sup>, the agreements signed by Greece with Italy and Egypt, for the delimitation of the countries' respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), were submitted to Parliament Thursday, where they are expected to be ratified on



Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- August 21<sup>st</sup>, four F-16 fighter jets of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will be deployed at the Souda Air Base in Crete in the next few hours. In the coming days, these aircrafts and their crews will carry out joint training with the Greek Armed Forces over the Eastern Mediterranean. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- August 21<sup>st</sup>, Berlin is working on bringing Greece and Turkey on the table of dialogue. Germany puts diplomatic efforts to convince Athens and Ankara to restart the stalled exploratory negotiations on bilateral issues which froze after Greece signed a maritime border deal with Egypt, angering Turkey. The crucial dates will be after August 23<sup>rd</sup>, when Turkey's Navtex - based on which the "ORUC REIS" vessel conducted seismic survey off Kastellorizo - expires. (www.ekathimerini.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Greek Armed Forces remain in high readiness due to Turkish activity in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The Hellenic Navy is deployed following closely the Turkish vessels. Situation could be described as extremely dangerous since an accident or a minor incident could be evolved into an armed conflict. The recent collision between a Greek and Turkish frigate fully confirms that accidents (?) could happen at any time. Germany and France push both countries for de-escalation of tension and start of dialogue but as long as the Turkish research vessel and Navy ships are deployed Greece is not keen on sitting on the table of negotiations. Greece and Cyprus have decided to push EU leaders for im-*

*posing sanctions to Turkey if the latter continues its aggressive behavior. However, it is still unlikely that EU member states will agree in such a scenario. In the diplomatic "chessboard" ratification of the recent agreements between Greece, Italy and Egypt on delimitating maritime zones angering Turkey. It should be also underlined that Greek Air Force will conduct joined drills with UAE Air Force in the Greek territory. One should take into consideration that Turkey and UAE are geopolitical rivals seeking to dominate in the region. Under current situation in Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea, Greece is forced to strengthen and modernize its Armed Forces operational capability.*



**KOSOVO:** August 20<sup>th</sup>, Kosovo Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti told a Pristina TV that officials from Belgrade and Pristina will discuss economic issues at the coming meeting in Washington, adding that there can be no technical dialogue only a discussion of mutual recognition. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- August 23<sup>rd</sup>, the White House has rescheduled the meeting between officials from Belgrade and Pristina for September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020 a US administration Spokesman told the Nova.rs portal. Meeting was scheduled for September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 but talks were postponed for two days because of the agenda. (www.rs.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Kosovo is preparing for talks with Serbia in Washington on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The US administration will facilitate negotiations between the two parts mainly for technical issues. In other words, economic issues will be the priority of*

*discussions. Although Kosovo Prime Minister, Avdulah Hoti claims that there is no talks on technical issues but only mutual recognition, Kosovo delegation will travel in the US joining negotiations. Rumors that the US administration will push for an agreement are strengthened while it is also said that the US President, Donald Trump it might attend talks. Fight against corruption, organized crime, money laundering, smuggling, trafficking, establishment of rule of law, accountable and transparent state institutions, and functional public administration are the main challenges for Kosovo towards its European path.*



**MOLDOVA:** August 17<sup>th</sup>, the Action and Solidarity Party (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS) held a protest rally on Sunday in Chisinau to condemn the Government's anti-COVID response and overall "incompetence." (www.ipn.md)

-August 17<sup>th</sup>, the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Liberal Democrat din Moldova - PLDM) held its national convention this past Sunday to re-elect Valeriu Filat as the party's president after a 5-year hiatus. Filat's candidacy was endorsed by 214 out of 215 delegates, including by the outgoing President Tudor Deliu. Filat led PLDM from the party's inception in 2008 and until his jailing in 2015 on charges of grand corruption. (www.ipn.md)

- August 18<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Ion Chicu attended an online meeting today with representatives of World Bank Arup Banerji, the new regional Director of the Eastern Europe for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, and Anna Akhalkatsi, Director of the World Bank office in Moldova, the Government's Communication and Protocol Department

has reported. Several important issues were discussed on the bilateral agenda of the Moldovan Government and the World Bank Group. The sides discussed the launch of the process of drafting a new Partnership Framework for our country, which will prioritize the Bank's operations in Moldova for the next 4-5 years, as well as the negotiation of a new Development Policy Program (DPO) meant to support the state budget in 2020. (www.moldpres.md)

- August 19<sup>th</sup>, the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Liberal Democrat din Moldova - PLDM) is inviting the Action and Solidarity Party (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS) and the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) to hold negotiations with a view to creating an electoral bloc and selecting a common candidate for the November presidential election. (www.ipn.md)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*The country moves towards social unrest due to economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social groups suffer from economic misery and opposition first protests have appeared in Moldovan roads. One of the poorest European countries could collapse if does not receive financial aid by international stakeholders. Moldovan Government has reached an agreement with IMF, while it is in talks with World Bank for further economic support. Besides, the Government is always seeking to the EU and US financial aid. The Moldovan Government enjoys fragile stability, while political instability and economic uncertainty reign in the country. Inadequate and dysfunctional institutions, corrupted state officials and public servants, absence of rule of law, money laundering, organized crime, smuggling, con-*

*trolled justice and poor economic performances are the main challenges of Moldova affecting good governance and economic growth. Moldova has become a field of the ongoing rivalry for influence between the West (namely the EU and NATO) and Russia. The country is considered by the US and EU of great strategic importance being in the soft underbelly of Russia. On the other hand, Moldova is considered by Russia as an important region for its national security belonging by principle to its sphere of influence. Russia maintains troops in Transnistria which are considered by pro-western forces as violating Moldovan sovereignty. The frozen conflict of Transnistria is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.*



#### **MONTENEGRO:** August 18<sup>th</sup>,

Montenegro's Ministry of Defense purchased from the Serbian company DAMIBA four new drones. The Army has 13 commercial drones in total, all of which are used solely for training of soldiers and needs of the Army's third mission (assistance to civic institutions). ([www.cdm.me](http://www.cdm.me))

- August 21<sup>st</sup>, the country must ensure that citizens can vote freely and exercise their constitutional rights without any limitations, while at the same time adhering strict health recommendations and guidelines on the protection of their safety, said Croatian representative in the European Parliament, Tonino Picula, EP Rapporteur to Montenegro and Vladimir Bilcik, representative and leader of the EP delegation to this country. ([www.cdm.me](http://www.cdm.me))

#### **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** :

*Parliamentary elections will be held on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and parties strengthen their pre-electoral campaign seeking to get public attention. In the meanwhile, consultations are underway for potential electoral cooperation. The possibility of pro-Russian/Serbian parties coming to power is a major concern of Western allies of Montenegro. There are several warnings that foreign stakeholders namely Serbia and Russia will try to interfere in the Montenegrin elections aiming to promote pro-Serbian/Russian parties. In this context, NATO has deployed several months ago hybrid warfare experts aiming to tackle attacks of such form. In sum, although Montenegro is a NATO member and is very close to the EU accession, there is concern that Russia still works on establishing influence in the country. The state maintains high levels of corruption, organized crime, smuggling, money laundering, poor public administration transparency and accountability, corrupted politicians, absence of rule of law and problematic justice function. Montenegro – Serbia relations remain tense undermining good neighboring between the two countries and endangering stability of the region.*



**NORTH MACEDONIA:** August 18<sup>th</sup>, the Alliance of Albanians (Алијанса за Албанците – АА) and its coalition partner Alternative are considering a boycott of the next Parliament, unless an ethnic Albanian is elected Prime Minister. ([www.republika.mk](http://www.republika.mk))

- August 18<sup>th</sup>, Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijalde-mokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) party leader Zoran Zaev announced that he reached an agreement to form a coalition in which he will be Prime Minister. Zaev said that Ali Ahmeti agreed with him taking the position –

having an ethnic Albanian Prime Minister was a key request of Ahmeti's Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) party before the elections. DUI and SDSM will jointly have 61 seats in Parliament – the bare minimum needed to form a Government. Zaev said that they will be supported by the small Democratic Party of Albanians (Demokratska Partija na Albancite - DPA) party which adds one vote. (www.republika.mk)

- August 21<sup>st</sup>, Struga Police found a large cache of RPG rounds and automatic rifle ammunition buried near the side of a local road. Police found 138 grenades, 41 metal cases full of ammunition for Kalashnikov and heavy machine guns, and even 760 pieces of anti-tank ammunition. (www.republika.mk)

- August 21<sup>st</sup>, Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) MP, Talat Xhaferi re-elected as the Parliament Speaker with 62 votes in favor and 43 against. Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) MPs voted against Xhaferi's election and left the Parliament after the vote. MPs from the Alliance of Albanians (Алијанса за Албанците – AA) and Alternative did not attend the session. (www.mia.mk)

- August 23<sup>rd</sup>, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) Spokesman Dimitar Arsovski

said that the party will soon decide whether to even attend the planned vote for the next Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) – Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) led Government. Opposition parties such as the Alliance of Albanians (Алијанса за Албанците – AA) and Alternative are expected to boycott to session and Arsovski was asked today if VMRO will do the same. (www.republika.mk)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*North Macedonia's politics returns back to normality after SDSM and DUI reached an agreement for forming a Government enjoying the fragile majority of 62 MPs (including a MP of PDA). Zoran Zaev achieved to remain Prime Minister, while Ali Ahmeti upgraded his party (DUI) position by getting key-Ministries such as the Foreign Affairs and Economy. Moreover, DUI achieved to establish a new office of Deputy Prime Minister held by its MP, Artan Grubi having extensive powers. Although DUI does not reflect all ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia it should be highlighted that it achieved significant gains upgrading the role of the Albanians in domestic politics. It is assessed that opposition VMRO-DPMNE will work on overthrowing the fragile majority of the ruling coalition seeking to early parliamentary elections. The new Government should focus on reforms regarding justice, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, public administration, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process.*



**ROMANIA:** August 17<sup>th</sup>, the Social

Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) tabled a censure motion against the Government today. PSD leader, Marcel Ciolacu added that there are talks with all political parties represented in Parliament to endorse the censure motion. The PSD chair said that his party has enough votes to topple down the Ludovic Orban Cabinet. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- August 21<sup>st</sup>, Prime Minister Ludovic Orban, who was present at the reading of the motion against the Government filed by PSD said his cabinet would challenge the motion at the Constitutional Court invoking a constitutional conflict between the Parliament and the Government. Orban believes that no-confidence motion cannot be debated and voted during an extraordinary session of the Parliament. However, former Constitutional Court members argue that there is no mention in the Constitution in this regard. (www.romania-insider.com)

- August 23<sup>rd</sup>, Marcel Ciolacu was elected chair of the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) at the party's extraordinary congress held on Saturday. Ciolacu had been interim leader of the party since the end of 2019, after the former Prime Minister Viorica Dancila had also withdrawn from the party's helm. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Political dispute has broken out due to censure motion of PSD against the Government. PSD claims that it has secured the necessary votes to topple the Government, while the latter has appealed the Constitutional Court claiming that*

*opposition's actions is unconstitutional. Taking into consideration that elections will take place on coming December (most likely on December 6th, 2020) one could wonder the reason PSD filed the no-confidence motion. It is assessed that PSD is challenging Orban's Government seeking to take advantage of public dissatisfaction due to COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, ruling PNL seeks to gain some political time until December. Romania enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia and its access to the Black Sea. NATO military force in Europe is gradually shifting from central Europe (Germany) to the east. It is assessed that such deployment of NATO forces is jeopardizing the balance of power in the region (Eurasia) and as recent history confirms, such plans are not remain unanswered by Russia. Russia's surrounding by NATO from the north to the south becomes increasingly stifling and Romania could become the central field of confrontation between Russia and NATO. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.*



**SERBIA:** August 18<sup>th</sup>, Serbia has

started constructing a wire fence on the border with North Macedonia near the southwestern town of Presevo, to prevent the possible massive entry of migrants from that country, Radio Free Europe (RFE) reported. (www.n1info.com)

- August 19<sup>th</sup>, the Serbian Armed Forces is set to take part in the International Army Games in Russia and Belarus from August 23rd to September 5th, 2020 the Serbian Defense Ministry said on Wednesday. A total of 46 soldiers will take part in the games, including nine in rus. (www.rs.n1info.com)



- August 20<sup>th</sup>, Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic said on Thursday that official Belgrade is facing a choice of siding with Moscow or Beijing. Dacic said that serious talks are coming about the future of Serbia. He said that Belgrade will be asked to choose between Russia and China. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- August 20<sup>th</sup>, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said on Thursday that there will be changes in the new Government and that as long as he was conscious and as long as he could reason, Serbia would not recognize Kosovo. Vucic said that he seeks to include in the new Government young people because “new times demand new people.” The President rejected any possibility of discussing in Washington the final status of Kosovo. (www.rs.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Ruling SNS does not reveal its plans for the new Government. It is still under question if its old, traditional ally – SPS – will join the cabinet eventually. Serbian President and leader of SNS, Aleksandar Vucic has announced that the Government will include several young people seeking to refresh it sending a message of renewal. This renewal may affect Ana Brnabic as the Prime Minister as well. In sum, Vucic is trying to establish new balances within his party and such plan may cause internal tension in the near future. The EU and US express through various channels their concern over Serbia's democratic rule, media freedom and human rights. The country is always threatened of destabilization due to opposition's activism seeking to topple SNS's Government and the “hybrid regime” it has established. Serbia's decision to approach Russia or China it may affect the country's internal sta-*

*bility itself. Serbian approach with Russia or China especially in the defense sector makes western powers nervous. Belgrade – Pristina talks will continue on September 4<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 in Washington DC focusing on economic issues. Vucic was very clear that talks will focus on technical issues rejecting any idea for discussing final status of Kosovo. Of course such a statement does not exclude the possibility of an agreement between the two parts on normalization of economic issues. The EU has raised serious concerns over Serbia's effectiveness on independence and accountability of the judiciary, freedom of expression, prevention of corruption and the fight against organized crime. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia so far.*



**SLOVENIA:** August 17<sup>th</sup>, the Council of the coalition Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) postponed to August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 the vote on whether party leader Aleksandra Pivec should further enjoy the party's confidence, following the conflict of interest allegations. According to the DeSUS council Head and Health Minister, Tomaz Gantar, said the reason for the postponement was a Government session scheduled for Thursday. (www.sta.si)

- August 20<sup>th</sup>, the Head of the Defense Ministry's Intelligence and Security Service (OVS), Andrej Osolnik, was relieved of his duties and Jaros Britovsek was appointed acting Director General by the Government. Osolnik handed in his resignation five months after being appointed for a full

five-year term at the Government's maiden session. Britovsek will take over as acting Director General on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. He will serve in this position until a full-fledged Director General is appointed. (www.sta.si)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Janez Jansa's Government enjoys relative stability. Slovenia – Croatia dispute regarding the Piran Bay is still active but without tension or escalation. Slovenia announced that it supports Croatian accession in the Schengen zone. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. According to the Armed Forces annual assessment the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. Adoption of an ambitious 780 million euro modernization project may improve operational capabilities of the Slovenian Armed Forces.*



**TURKEY:** August 17<sup>th</sup>, Turkey's third oil and natural gas exploration drillship, "Kanuni" will soon join two other drillships, "Fatih" and "Yavuz" in the Eastern Mediterranean. "Kanuni" recently underwent some extensive upgrades and refit in the southern province of Mersin. It is currently at a port in Mersin's Tasucu. (www.dailysabah.com)

- August 17<sup>th</sup>, Turkey and Qatar have reiterated their support for Libya's internationally recognized Government during a trip by their Defense Ministers to the capital, Tripoli, where Germany's Foreign Minister also paid an unexpected visit. The Turkish Minister, Hulusi Akar was accompa-

nied by the Chief of Staff General Yasar Guler. (www.aljazeera.com)

- August 18<sup>th</sup>, Turkey dispatched a drilling ship to an area off the southwestern coast of Cyprus on Tuesday, in a move that could fuel territorial disputes with EU member states in the eastern Mediterranean. Ankara resumed its search of the contested waters last week after German-mediated negotiations with Greece collapsed when Athens announced a maritime delimitation agreement with Egypt on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 in retaliation to a similar deal between Turkey and Libya. (www.aljazeera.com)

- August 19<sup>th</sup>, Turkey has launched a new anti-terror operation in its eastern Bingol province, the Interior Ministry announced on Wednesday. Operation "Yildirim-6" has begun to completely eliminate Kurdish militant group PKK and neutralize those taking shelter in the region. As many as 700 security personnel, including forces from Gendarmerie Special Operations, Police and security guards, are taking part in the operation, it added. (www.aa.com.tr)

- August 19<sup>th</sup>, Turkey's lira rebounded from an all-time low on Wednesday, a day before the Central Bank is expected to take more back-door steps to rein in credit, though a formal rate hike remains a less likely option to support the sagging currency. (www.aljazeera.com)

- August 19<sup>th</sup>, the Turkish Armed Forces will provide assistance to restructuring the Libyan Army into a regular army based on the model that was used in training the Azerbaijani Army. Turkish military advisers and staff will soon arrive at the Defense Security Cooperation and Training Assistance Advisory Command that was established as



part of a memorandum of understanding between Turkey and Libya. They will provide training and logistical assistance in cooperation with Qatar to reestablish a regular army in Libya. (www.dailysabah.com)

- August 20<sup>th</sup>, Turkish Foreign Ministry late Thursday criticized the EU's recent statement on situation in the Eastern Mediterranean and called on the bloc to have an objective and honest stance on the issue. The Ministry's Spokesperson Hami Aksoy concluded that Turkey will continue to respond to positive steps by not giving up its rights. (www.dailysabah.com)

- August 21<sup>st</sup>, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on Friday that Turkey discovered its biggest ever natural gas field holding 320 billion cubic metres (11.3 trillion cubic feet) in the Black Sea, and more could be found as the country works to provide it by as soon as 2023. (www.aljazeera.com)

- August 23<sup>rd</sup>, Turkish air and naval forces conducted joint training exercises in the Aegean Sea, the country's Defense Ministry said on Saturday, amid increasing tension with its neighbor Greece over hydrocarbon discoveries. F-16 fighter jets and warships took part in the exercise. (www.dailysabah.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Turkey exercises its ambitious, multilateral external policy seeking to expand its influence and promote its national interests appearing as a regional power. The most significant achievement of Turkey so far is that is capable to support its plans and its words by actions. Currently, it supports by military personnel and weapons Libya*

*and Azerbaijan, it has sent military forces in Syria, it has deployed its naval forces in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea and it exercises influential military policy in African countries (Somalia etc). Moreover, Turkey has achieved to be involved in most talks which determine the future of regional affairs as an equal member. In this context, the country joins talks on Syria settlement, it has a word on Libya and definitely is a key factor in Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict. President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan strengthens cleverly Turkey's leading role in the Muslim world adding more power in state's policy. Currently, Turkey appears isolated in the EU but without significant consequences since European reaction in Turkish aggression against the two EU member states - Greece and Cyprus - is limited in verbal support. The biggest problem for Turkey is its isolation for cooperation models in the Eastern Mediterranean and its energy resources. That is why Turkey is so active and aggressive in the region. Energy security and energy diversification are key factors for states' security and growth and it is certain that Turkey will not accept "fait accompli" in a region which is considered of vital interest. As long as Turkey is isolated by other countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, tension will remain active in the region; especially between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. France also is a major factor which threatens of deconstructing Turkish plans due to its active role in Mediterranean Sea and Libya where it enjoys vital interests. Economic situation of Turkey and its almost uncontrolled collapse of national currency (Lira) may become a major factor of destabilization in Turkey and its internal and external affairs. Discovery of a huge gas field in the Black Sea should be evaluated and confirmed. In any case it could become a vital field for Turkey's energy diversification and its gradu-*


*al independence from Russian imports. Moreover, it could add Turkey in the energy exporters' global map. The country continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted.*


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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.*