



**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. However Greece enjoys its own weekly review for a more detailed presentation of its current affairs (GREECE AT A GLANCE).

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

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ALBANIA: May 11th, opposition Lawmakers outside Parliament at the meeting of the Political Council, Oerd Bykykbashi of the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) and Petrit Vasili of the Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI), demanded the completion of the electoral reform as soon as possible. For this they presented the following 3 requests: 1. The reform should not be delayed any longer than the May 31st, 2020. 2. Meetings between the parties should be restored to the table format, not through online communication. 3. To resume the work of the Political Council with the issues proposed by the opposition, so that the other parties to express their position on all the proposals left unanswered so far. (www.top-channel.tv)

- May 14th, Albanian economy is expected to see the greatest recession in the past 20 years as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The grim forecast comes from the Bank of Albania (BSh). BSh Governor Gent Sejko warned in a press conference on Wednesday that the economic recession would be accompanied by a significant increase in unemployment and a decline in Albanian families' income. He stressed that the crisis would have an unavoidable impact on the financial and banking sector. Sejko also added that the principal responsibility for managing the crisis falls on public institutions. The main challenges BSh will face in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic will be protecting human capital, protecting businesses from bankruptcy, and maintaining the country's financial stability. The bank will also have to review business

models and adapt them to remote working. (www.exit.al.com)

- May 17th, hundreds of protesters in Tirana clashed with Police on Sunday after an Albanian state body dealing with illegal construction bulldozed the historic National Theatre, after Police stormed the site and arrested protesters who had gathered to defend it. Demolition was bitterly opposed by activists, opposition politicians and artists who wanted the buildings originally constructed during World War II during the Italian occupation to be renovated. Prime Minister Edi Rama, on the other hand, said that those who opposed his plan for a new theatre “*do not love development.*” After the demolition, several hundred protesters battled the Police. A number were arrested after hitting Police with bottles of water. Police also arrested a journalist, Alfred Lela. President Ilir Meta intervened in the dispute on the side of the protesters, calling the demolition of the theatre “*a moral crime that cannot be granted amnesty.*” He also criticized violence used against protesting artists and journalists by Police. The EU Delegation in Tirana also criticized demolition of the theatre, saying it had come at a time when “*we called for dialogue between authorities and civil society before an irreversible decision is taken. We regret that this call has not been followed up by the relevant national and local institutions.*” Previously, the EU Commissioner for Culture, Mariya Gabriel, urged Albanian authorities to try dialogue before going ahead with demolition work. “*Dialogue with civil society and experts of cultural heritage is necessary before taking an irreversible decision on National Theatre. We strongly encourage all relevant national institutions to engage now in a constructive*

dialogue with heritage stakeholders,” she said. Edmond Budina, a film director and one of those who protested against the destruction of the buildings, called the event a turning point in Albania’s democracy. “This is not the destruction of a building. This is also the installation of a dictatorship,” he said. The Municipal Council of Tirana apparently decided to destroy the buildings three days ago, but Council decisions only enter force 10 days after their publication, making the demolition legally questionable. It is unclear what prompted the Socialist Prime Minister, who was behind the original plan to demolish the old theatre and build a new one, to move forward with the plan during a time of health crisis. The battle over the Italian occupation-era theater has lasted for two years. Rama’s previous plan was to build a smaller theater on the same site through a public-private partnership, giving the rest of the land to the private partner. That failed a few months ago. It was seen as a victory for those who defended the old bullrings. The clashes on Sunday came after opposition politicians and activists on Friday vowed to stop the Government and the municipality from demolishing the theater. (www.balkaninsight.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Government has opened a direct confrontation with civil society by demolishing the historic National Theatre. Protests and clashes followed the demolition, while the state’s President, opposition and international community condemned the Government’s unilateral actions and its refusal to conduct dialogue for the issue. The case is added in the long political, institutional and constitutional crisis in Albania deepening the country’s instability. It should be noted that democratic

function is worsening in the country, while the Albanian society seems ready to be exploded. Situation may become tenser if Albania will enter into an economic recession in the near future due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Albanian Central Bank’s forecasts are not very encouraging on Albanian economy. The country needs fair and free elections in order public discontent to be relieved. Opposition refuses to join the electoral reform process claiming that the ruling PS is refusing to accept its proposals. Under these circumstances it is difficult to see the EU to announce the opening of accession negotiations in June 2020. Corruption, organized crime (and especially links of state’s politics with organized crime), money laundering and smuggling remain as “open sores” for the country. The long judicial abnormality continues in the country affecting the Albanian justice system. It is not acceptable for a country which is in the “waiting room” of the EU to maintain malfunctions in the high judicial institutions (High Court, Justice Appointment Council etc).



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

May 11th: Bosnia and Herzegovina has definitely been removed from the European list of high-risk countries in terms of money laundering and terrorist financing, reports Indikator.ba. The European Commission announced that on May 7th, 2020 it removed BiH from the list together with Ethiopia, Guyana, Laos, Sri Lanka and Tunisia, according to Avaz.ba news portal. Although Bosnia and Herzegovina was removed from the black list of the Working Group for the Suppression of Money Laundering (FATF) in February 2018, and before that from the gray list of MONEYVAL in 2015, the EU has kept BiH on

the list of high-risk countries. Due to that, the implementation of financial transactions was difficult, because banks operating in the EU were obliged to carry out special procedures when it comes to money sent to BiH, or from BiH to the EU. Export companies also suffered from collection difficulties. After BiH reached the bottom a few years ago, in a circle of countries such as Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia and Yemen, the authorities have recoiled and made a significant effort to meet the country's international obligations. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

May 11th, unless the main Bosnian Croat party gives up on its “irrational” demands, the nearly 330 million euro loan the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved for Bosnia and Herzegovina to respond to the economic consequences of the coronavirus crisis will remain blocked, the leader of the ruling Bosniak (Muslim Bosnian) party in the country, Bakir Izetbegovic, told N1 on Monday. The millions Bosnia borrowed from the IMF remain at the country's Central Bank because of disagreement on how it will be distributed in one of the country's two semi-autonomous regions. The IMF approved the loan in April after the country's two sub-state regions - the Serb-majority Republika Srpska (RS) and the Bosniak-Croat majority Federation (FBiH) - agreed on how to split it. According to the deal, 62% was to go to the FBiH while 38% to the RS. FBiH consists of ten cantons and half of the money the entity would receive would then go to the cantonal Governments, while the other half would remain with the FBiH Government. But three Bosniak Ministers voted against the distribution plan proposed by the Finance Ministry, arguing the

proposal is not in line with the initial agreement. The Bosnian Croat Ministers say the Bosniaks are blocking the distribution of the funds while the Bosniaks are blaming the Croat Ministers. At the core of the problem is which law will be applied that determines how the international loan will be paid back. Izetbegovic, the leader of Bosnia's Party for Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA), told N1 that the process is being blocked by the main Bosnian Croat party in the country, Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH). *“It is being blocked by the stance of the HDZ to involve the cantons in Council of Ministers decisions in an unconstitutional way,”* Izetbegovic said, calling this demand “irrational.” *“Even if they would achieve that, I do not know what the final goal of it is. Is it some kind of visibility for the canton, a political necessity ahead of the (local) election?”* he asked. *“Only three cantons with a population of 200,000 are dominated by Croats. I do not see a political gain while the loss would be huge,”* he added. Izetbegovic said that the funds will remain blocked until the HDZ BiH stops its “irrational demands and illegal policies.” *“We cannot position the cantons the way some want us to because of political needs. The citizens need the money now. The Council of Ministers oversees the RS and FBiH, it does not deal with the distribution within FBiH,”* he said. Izetbegovic then criticized the HDZ BiH over the new Government in FBiH not being formed since the 2018 election. *“The HDZ does not want it and it suits them,”* he said, arguing that the HDZ BiH currently has the FBiH President position and a number of other offices under its control. *“The election results gave them those positions. When*

they get 13 or 14 out of 18 positions then they can act this way. You must give in, make compromises,” he said. (www.banlinfo.com)

- May 17th, elections must be held in Mostar this year, the US Ambassador to Bosnia Eric Nelson said, adding that it only remains unclear if the politicians and Lawmakers will find a solution for that to happen or if the Court will have to intervene. Speaking to Radio Free Europe, the Ambassador said that there was a way to solve this issue in a way that the Parliament adopts necessary laws to make the elections happen in the City of Mostar. European Court of Human Rights intervened and said it was ridiculous the citizens of Mostar were unable to vote for years, Nelson recalled. We continue encouraging dialogue among the parties to reach a necessary compromise and do this, the Ambassador said, stressing it was very important that political leaders do not put their narrow political interests above the rights and needs of the citizens of Mostar. Bosnia's top electoral authority (CIK) decided on May 7th, 2020 that local elections will be held across the country on October 4th, 2020 with the exception of the southern city of Mostar. CIK Secretary said the elections in Mostar would be called once conditions for that are met. Local elections in the City of Mostar were last held in 2008. Two years later, the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina acted upon motion of Croat representatives in the state Parliament, assessing as unconstitutional parts of the Bosnia's Election Law which refer to the City of Mostar. The Court tasked the state Parliament in 2010 to amend the Election Law regarding the provisions which treat the electoral rules in that city but this did not happen to date and Mostar elections

remain the subject of political disagreements. (www.banlinfo.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Disagreement on distribution of the 330 million euro loan received by the IMF strengthens the view that the decision-making process of the Dayton Accords is problematic and dysfunctional. Although the money have approved by the IMF, they remain blocked due to entities disagreements and their micro-political interests. This could be added in the long inefficiency of federal state to adopt the 2020 budget blocking implementation of important public constructions and the establishment of a healthy economy. Bosnia remains (together with Serbia) the vulnerable part of the Western influence in Southeastern Europe and Russia tries to penetrate through various ways. Political instability, poor economic performances, entities' rivalries, and problematic framework of state's structure (due to Dayton Accord) have left Bosnia far behind other Western Balkan countries towards the EU. Furthermore, nationalistic rhetoric and actions from the three entities creates certain conditions of mutual mistrust and work as a factor of potential destabilization. Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments.



BULGARIA: May 13th, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov on Wednesday declined to accept ownership of the Football Club Levski, which was offered to him in a sarcastic manner by the exiled Bulgarian tycoon Vasil Bojkov, who is hiding in the United Arab Emirates after numerous charges were pressed

against him in early 2020. Bojkov said he was offering the Prime Minister the club as he was responsible for its financial hardships, because he had caused “*the deliberate and illegal eradication of the companies providing for its maintenance.*” Bojkov was referring to the way his business interests were seriously hurt after his National Lottery company was nationalized and numerous charges were brought against him. The title deeds to the club were brought to the Council of Ministers by a well-known TV host, Sasho Dikov, who described himself as just a courier. Dikov claimed Bojkov had called him earlier to hand over the documents on Wednesday. Borissov’s office dismissed the offer of a 86.6% share in the club as an insult. “*The way in which this thing is happening is insulting, humiliating and it is absurd to send documents in this manner,*” the Prime Minister’s Spokesman commented. Levski FC, one of the major football clubs in the country, has been in a dire financial state since Bojkov’s arrest. From 1999 to 2006, he owned rival team CSKA Sofia. In March 2019, he redirected his interests towards Levski. Ownership of the club has long been associated with political interests. Borissov is also known as a Levski fan, and at recent press conferences suggested the Government might help to support the club. Bojkov is currently facing charges of leading an organized criminal group, coercion, attempted bribery of an official, withholding intellectual property and tax evasion, among others. Known by the nickname “*Cherepa*” (“*Skull*”), Bojkov, born in 1956, graduated in mathematics from a university in Sofia. He was known to the Communist-era state security service for his gambling activities as early as the mid-1980s, when they were still illegal. His career took off in the early 1990s with a chain of currency exchange

offices, and then expanded into the gambling industry as well as into road construction and football. In 2011, his name was mentioned in a diplomatic cable from the US Embassy in Sofia, published by WikiLeaks, which focused on links in Bulgaria between business and organized crime. Since charges were pressed, he has been based in the UAE. On February 17th, 2020 Bulgaria officially sought his extradition from the Gulf state. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- May 13th, Bulgaria’s economic output is expected to decline by 5% in 2020, mainly because of a sharp decrease in economic activity in March and during the second quarter due to the domestic containment measures pursued by the authorities to fight the coronavirus pandemic, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) said in a May 2020 update of its regional economic prospects report. Under the baseline scenario, recovery is expected in 2021, with GDP growth of 4%, the EBRD said. In 2019, Bulgaria recorded a solid growth of 3.4%, driven mainly by private consumption, fuelled by increased earnings and a higher employment rate amid the tightening labor market, with an unemployment rate of around 4%, the update said. The report noted that Bulgaria declared a state of emergency on March 13th, 2020 imposing tough restrictions on travel and economic activity including closing schools, restaurants, bars and non-essential shops. “*A significant drop in consumption of services and durable goods is expected, affecting SMEs in particular.*” Demand-side effects are likely to be large, given that retail trade and other directly affected services account for almost 25% of GDP. Other key transmission channels include a slowdown in exports of goods, given the lower demand globally, and postponed

investments amid increased uncertainty and bearish market sentiment, the EBRD said. In addition, Bulgaria's tourism sector will be strongly hit (tourist spending accounts for about 10% of GDP), the report said. The mitigating factor will come from the increased Government spending in the form of a fiscal crisis response package of about 3% of GDP announced so far. The EBRD said that Bulgaria's budget, redrafted in light of the new circumstances, envisions a deficit of 2.9% of GDP, compared to a previously planned balanced budget. After four consecutive years of budget surpluses, and with public debt at 21% of GDP, Bulgaria is among the least indebted countries in the EU, the report said. Also, the Bulgarian National Bank has reacted promptly providing liquidity to the banking sector. The country's entry to the ERM2 is now scheduled for July 2020, although a further delay could not be ruled out. Under the baseline scenario, a recovery is expected in 2021, with GDP growth of 4%, the EBRD said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- May 15th, Bulgaria's economy posted 0.3% growth in the first quarter of 2020, the National Statistical Institute (NSI) said in a flash estimate on May 15th, 2020. In real terms, gross domestic product (GDP) in Bulgaria in the first three months of the year was 25.15 billion leva, or 12.86 billion euro. In annual terms, economic growth in the first quarter was 2.4%. NSI is due to announce preliminary growth figures for the quarter on June 4th, 2020. NSI made no reference to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which prompted Bulgaria to declare a State of Emergency on March 13th, 2020 shutting down parts of its economy as it introduced social distancing and anti-epidemic measures. The flash

estimate's seasonally-adjusted data showed domestic consumption shrink by 0.1 per cent during the first quarter (but was 4.1% higher on an annual basis), while gross fixed capital formation fell by 0.9% (and was down 5.3% year-on-year). Exports rose by 0.1% during the first quarter (and were 1.1% higher compared to the same period of 2019), while imports declined by 0.2% compared to the previous quarter (and were 0.6% lower on an annual basis). The country recorded a trade surplus of 149.9 million leva the first quarter, the equivalent of 0.6 per cent of GDP NSI said. Bulgaria was one of only three EU countries to record economic growth during the first quarter of the year, with seven countries yet to report data and the rest all in decline, according to a flash estimate by EU's statistics body Eurostat. EU countries that were hit the worst by the pandemic posted the worst declines – France's economy shrank by 5.8% in the first quarter, Spain by 5.2% and Italy by 4.7%. Germany's economy was down 2.2%. The EU economy as a whole declined by 3.3% and the eurozone economy shrank by 3.8%. On an annual basis, the EU was down 2.7% and the eurozone economy decreased by 3.2%, Eurostat said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Bulgaria's economy is at risk although it enjoys a dynamic which has stopped due to COVID-19 pandemic. Economic situation may affect not only the Bulgarian effort to enter the ERM2 mechanism; the "waiting room" before the eurozone, but also the political stability of the country. Dispute with North Macedonia on "Macedonian" language and "Macedonian minority" may disrupt bilateral relations between the two countries. Bulgaria pushes North

Macedonia to abandon its views if the latter wishes to start accession negotiations with the EU. Migration poses a national security threat but currently situation is under control since migrant and refugee flows coming from Turkey are not increased. Nevertheless, situation is closely monitored by Bulgarian authorities. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively. The country pays special attention to energy security developing several projects. 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: May 11th, the President of the Miroslav Skoro Homeland Movement (Domovinski pokret Miroslava Škore), Miroslav Skoro, and the representatives of the Croatian Sovereignists signed a coalition agreement on joint participation in the upcoming parliamentary elections. At a press conference, Skoro said that he was satisfied that, after the agreement with the Bloc for Croatia, they had reached an agreement with the Croatian Sovereignists, and that they wanted everyone who wanted changes in Croatia to join this political option. *“We are talking to everyone who is fed up with this duopoly of the Croatian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party and who would like to make those necessary changes that the people want. It is neither a phrase nor populism, but a real desire. All those who wish*

this are welcome. Those whose personal interest is not ahead of the interest of what the Croatian people need in the political sense,” Skoro said. *“Croatia asks of us to all be together and to finally offer Croatia a political alternative. That is why the Croatian Sovereignists, together with the Homeland Movement and other partners, will be the alternative that Croats have been looking for for a long time,”* said Hrvoje Zekanovic from the Croatian Sovereignists. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- May 11th, Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ) presidency and national council convene to discuss current political issues, from the work of the Croatian Parliament to the budget revision that has been forwarded into parliamentary procedure. Speaking to reporters ahead of the meeting HDZ leader and Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said that a final date for the next parliamentary elections would be agreed upon by the parliamentary majority. *“When we assess that the epidemiological circumstances are appropriate, and it seems to me that they are, then we can make a decision in Parliament to that effect,”* Plenkovic said. As for the HDZ's electoral lists and the possibility of the now former Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister, Damir Krsticevic, topping the slate for the 10th electoral constituency, Plenkovic said that when the time to address the issue of electoral slates the issue would be addressed in its entirety. Plenkovic also commented on a statement from the Director of the Croatian Institute of Public Health, Krunoslav Capak, who said at a press conference that he believed that people who have been prescribed self-isolation measures could also go to the polls. *“I do not know exactly what Mr. Capak said, I*

have been dealing with too many other issues. The State Election Commission is responsible for holding the elections and it will make all decisions pertaining to the elections. When making its decisions, the State Election Commission will consult with Institute for Public Health regarding possible recommendations. But that is an issue for later on,” Plenkovic added. Plenkovic also touched on efforts to rebuild Zagreb in the wake of the March 22nd earthquake *“We had a big meeting on the subject. It was agreed that Government would adopt a conclusion on Thursday, by which we will agree to provide funds to cover rent for all those people who cannot stay in their apartments and houses due to structural damage.”* He concluded that the Construction and Spatial Planning Ministry would form a commission that will review the preliminary assessments of the condition of damaged buildings, in order to establish a complete overview of the situation. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- May 14th, the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ) leader and Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic announced that the 9th assembly of Croatian Parliament will be dissolved on Monday May 18th, 2020. Speaking to reporters after a meeting with the parties’ leaders that are part of his coalition Government, Plenkovic said that they had agreed to propose the dissolution of this session of Croatian Parliament on Monday, May 18th, 2020. Plenkovic added that the constitutional deadline leaves President Zoran Milanovic the possibility of calling parliamentary elections on June 21st, June 28th, July 5th or July 12th, 2020. Plenkovic expressed his belief that he would regain the trust of the citizens, adding that HDZ

plans on running alone and is confident in another election victory. He said that HDZ will talk with potential coalition partners after the elections. Commenting on his coalition partners during this mandate, Plenkovic thanked all of them for their trust and cooperation. *“If they are re-elected and want to cooperate with us again, to form a parliamentary majority, we will be ready for that,”* Plenkovic said. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling HDZ announced the dissolution of the Parliament on May 18th, 2020. The President, Zoran Milanovic will call for elections end of June or beginning of July. Croatian economy is expected to suffer due to COVID-19 measures and the Government needs to make hard decisions. In this context, a new Government with fresh mandate is needed to make such decisions. Croatia – Slovenia border dispute remains active, but COVID-19 pandemic and pre-electoral period in Croatia have downsized current situation. 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: May 12th, the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) is stepping up patrols after the detonation of a small explosive device caused damages to a bakery on Tuesday, it said. *“Today at around 3am a small explosive device exploded outside a bakery in the*

bi-communal village of Pyla,” UNFICYP said in a statement. “The explosion also caused minor damage to property, but fortunately no one was injured,” UNFICYP added. According to the statement “the incident is cause for great concern,” and UNFICYP urged that the perpetrators must be brought to justice as soon as possible. “The mission is monitoring situation closely and has deployed additional peacekeeping patrols in the area to ensure that calm and stability is maintained,” the statement concluded. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 15th, the EU27 member states expressed their full solidarity and support for Cyprus’ sovereignty, as the condemned Turkey’s illegal actions within the island’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), according to a statement adopted today by the Council of Foreign Ministers (FAC), which convened by teleconference. *“Following the latest decision by Turkey to dispatch a drilling ship on a new drilling operation within Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone, the EU recalls and reaffirms its position as clearly defined by previous relevant Council and European Council conclusions, notably those of June 2019 and October 2019 on Turkey’s continued illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean,”* the Council said. The EU27 noted that *“in line with previous Council Conclusions, the EU stands in full solidarity with Cyprus and reiterates that concrete steps towards creating an environment conducive to dialogue are needed.”* Issues related to delimitation of exclusive economic zones and the continental shelf should be addressed through dialogue and negotiation in good faith, in full respect of international law and in pursuit of the principle of good neighborly relations, the council said. *“In this respect, we welcome once again the*

invitation by the Government of Cyprus to Turkey to negotiate in good faith the maritime delimitation between their relevant coasts,” the Council said. *“The most recent escalating actions by Turkey regrettably go in the opposite direction,”* the EU27 stressed. *“We deplore that Turkey has not yet responded to the EU’s repeated calls to cease such activities and reiterate our call on Turkey to show restraint, refrain from such actions, and respect the sovereignty and sovereign rights of Cyprus, in accordance with international law,”* it was added. Diplomatic sources noted that it is particularly important that the EU welcomes and reaffirms the invitation of the Government of Cyprus to Turkey to start negotiations on the delimitation of maritime zones. The EU’s position is very clear and it is a clear response to Turkey’s refusal to negotiate with the Republic of Cyprus. Through the Declaration, the EU is committed to continuing to address the issue of Turkey’s illegal actions within the Cyprus EEZ, within the framework of the Council’s relevant Conclusions, which include the Concluding Memorandums measures against Turkey. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 16th, the Defense Ministers of Cyprus and France have reaffirmed their commitment to enhance the two countries’ bilateral defence cooperation. Defense Minister Savvas Angelides said in a post on social media that he had a very constructive and fruitful discussion with his French counterpart Florence Parly on Friday. *“We exchanged views for COVID-19 and reaffirmed our commitment to enhance our bilateral defense cooperation. We truly appreciate the solidarity of France,”* Angelides said. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus continues to react diplomatically against the Turkish drills in the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) denouncing Turkey's aggressive behavior against international law. In this effort it enjoys the EU support but only in rhetorical level since the union lacks of comprehensive military capabilities. Cyprus cannot to stop the Turkish activity so far, failing to protect its sovereign rights. Turkey has simply refused to withdraw from a region that it is considered as its strategic extension where vital geostrategic and geoeconomic interests are at stake. Cyprus lacks adequate military means (especially aeronautical forces) to deter Turkey from continuing its activity. However, it is not expected escalation of situation in the near future since energy companies have postponed their scheduled drills within the Cypriot EEZ. It is certain that Turkey will not accept "fait accompli" in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Besides, 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. Illegal migration is a challenge for Cyprus especially if migrant flows will be increased during summer.



GREECE: May 11th, Athens is on alert over attempts by Ankara to press a revisionist agenda, most recently by issuing navigational warnings (NAVWARNS) which

were seen as an attempt to obstruct the Greek naval training exercise "KATAIGIDA - 20" that was originally scheduled to begin Monday. All military exercises were postponed over the weekend amid concern over the spread of coronavirus. The NAVWARNS promote Turkish positions on issues pertaining to its sea border disputes with Greece, with Ankara essentially accusing Athens of violating the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Greece, for its part, views the specific NAVWARNS (684, 685 and 686/20) as invalid. There is also concern in Athens over Ankara's announcement of submarine exercises (SUBNOTES) close to the Aegean islands of Lemnos, Lesvos and Chios, in areas already reserved for exercises by the Hellenic Navy. Last week, Athens rejected fresh claims by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu questioning the sovereignty of certain Greek islands and islets. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 13th, a total of 16,000 asylum applications were processed in Greece in April, four times the usual monthly average, according to Migration Minister Notis Mitarakis, who added that 11,000 applications have been rejected over the past two months, paving the way for returns to Turkey. "They must return," Mitarakis said in comments to Skai Radio. "This is a very major issue that Greece first raised with the European Union in 2011," he said. A new law allows authorities to detain any individuals believed to be a flight risk, Mitarakis said. The returns will most likely resume once restrictions for containing the spread of the coronavirus have been lifted, he said. Mitarakis added that authorities are investigating suspected financial mismanagement at some nongovernmental organizations. Some NGOs have done their job, he said while linking others

to “*mismanagement and dubious goals.*” (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 15th, the Foreign Ministers of the EU condemned on Friday the violation of Greek airspace and territorial waters by Turkey and Ankara's drilling plans in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) during a teleconference. According to the final draft of the joint statement, the EU said it is “*in full solidarity*” with Cyprus and reiterates that “*tangible steps are needed to create a climate conducive to dialogue.*” “*We condemn the fact that Turkey has not yet responded to repeated calls from the EU to stop these activities and we reiterate our call on Turkey to show restraint, to avoid such moves and to respect the sovereignty and sovereign rights of Cyprus, as defined by international law,*” the ministers said. The statement welcomed Cyprus's invitation to Turkey to “*negotiate in good faith*” the limits of their maritime economic zones and stressed that “*recent escalating actions by Turkey [with the new drilling ship in the Cypriot EEZ] are moving in the opposite direction.*” Regarding Greek - Turkish relations, the Ministers also condemned the “*escalation of violations of Greek territorial waters and airspace*” by Turkey, which includes overflights over residential areas, in violation of international law. Commenting about situation in the Eastern Mediterranean at the press conference, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell said “*We uphold our principles and interests. We will continue our diplomatic engagement with Turkey to try to steer our relationship towards a cooperative and constructive approach.*” (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Greek – Turkish relations are the main concern of Greece since the latter is seeking to escalate security situation in the borders (land borders in Evros and sea borders in the Aegean). Moreover, Turkish plan to start hydrocarbon drills south of Crete in the context of the recent agreement between Turkey and Libya regarding maritime zones it may escalate tension between the two countries towards a “hot” incident. Greece seeks to avoid “fait accomplis” in a region where its Exclusive Economic Zone is located according to the international law. As long as it avoids declaring its EEZ in mutual agreements with its neighbors, Greece will have to address situations like this one. Under current situation in Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea Greece, Greece is obliged to strengthen and modernize its Armed Forces operational capability. As the Government enjoys citizen's trust due to its tackling of COVID-19 and the migration flows and the country may enter in economic recession in coming autumn, one could not exclude early elections during summer or beginning of autumn. Touristic activity during summer will determine the size of economic recession Greece will enter on coming autumn



KOSOVO: May 12th, once resumed, the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations, will include the disputable issue of the territory swap, the analysts say, adding the final agreement may be based on borders change, the Pristina RTK2 TV has reported on Tuesday. Misel Zubenica, the Executive Director of the Centre for International Public Policy, said communication between the two capital had not stopped even after Kosovo introduced the 100% import tariffs on goods from

Serbia in November 2018. He added that the agreements on air and railroad transport proved that. Zubenica expects dialogue to resume soon. *“I think that talks will formally continue very soon. They will be public, as they have been in Brussels before the taxes. That will happen soon after the elections in Serbia and the formation of a new Government,”* Zubenica said. *“I believe we will have negotiations by mid-summer. We see that those political processes are slowly speeding up,”* he added. Beluj Bechaj, a political scientist, said the outcome might be an agreement within the existing borders which would satisfy Berlin, or a solution could be found in territory swap, what Washington had not excluded. The problem is, he says, in the US' increasing influence over Europe. Zubenica also believes the exchange of territories can be one of the options because some of Serbia's officials, as well as some White House representatives, have indirectly confirmed it. He added that *“an agreement could envisage that some parts (of Kosovo) with the Serb population are granted a broad autonomy and that (the entire) Mountain. Kopaonik belongs to Serbia. At the same time, some municipalities (in Serbia) with an Albanian majority might strengthen relations with Pristina, maybe even join Kosovo as an entity, but without Belgrade's formal recognition.”* (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 15th, the EU representative to Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations Miroslav Lajcak wrote on social media that he agreed with the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) leader Isa Mustafa that talks should resume normalizing relations with Serbia. Lajcak thanked Mustafa for a constructive talk about current political situation, response to the coronavirus

pandemic and the expectation for Kosovo's future. However, Kosovo has still not formed a new Government after last October elections, and Serbia is ahead of the general vote on June 21st, 2020. Both processes are seen to prologue the continuation of dialogue. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 15th, Kosovo's outgoing Prime Minister Albin Kurti told President Hashim Thaci to step down and enter an election race, respecting the Constitution, the Beta news agency reported on Friday. Kurti told reporters that Thaci *“should leave the presidential post because he is not happy with his work.”* *“Let him start a campaign and see how many votes he will get. He wants to be more than the President, and that is why he needs someone less than a Prime Minister. I am not that person, and the October 6th ballot showed that,”* Kurti said, adding that *“we have a frustrated President preparing for an election campaign.”* He accused Thaci of *“fulfilling the Constitution holes with decrees”* and wanting to be the boss to all the Ministers, *“a king to a Prime Minister, and a Judge to Prosecutors.”* (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Political instability and uncertainty remain in Kosovo, while LDK, AAK and NISMA held consultations for forming a Government. Political rivalry between the caretaker Prime Minister, Albin Kurti and the Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci continues and is the main source of current political tension. Under these circumstances it is almost impossible to talk for progress in the Kosovo – Serbia dialogue and negotiation for normalizing mutual relations. The EU and US special envoys push for dialogue restart. It is assessed that after a new Kosovo Government

formation and the new Serbian Government after the June 21st elections, dialogue will start again. Fight against corruption, organized crime, money laundering and 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: May 11th, the President Igor Dodon announced he will propose to Parliament to appoint the date of the presidential elections for November 1st, 2020. The statement was made at the end of Monday's working meeting with Parliament Speaker Zinaida Grecianii and Prime Minister Ion Chicu. *“I propose to the parliamentary majority at the next meeting to nominate the date of November 1st for the presidential elections,”* Dodon said. The Head of state said *“some political forces want instability,”* and several MPs left their parties. (www.moldpres.md)

- May 11th, the parliamentary majority further supports the Government sworn in office in November 2019, despite attempts to destabilize situation in Moldova. The two parties, Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM) and Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) today discussed the getting out of the emergency state, cancellation of restrictions, as well as the latest changes on the political stage. PDM and PSRM stressed that they would continue to back the Cabinet, which, to a great extent, observes the commitments taken. The Democrats and the Socialists describe as noxious and counterproductive destabilization at political

level, taking into account the crisis in the health sector and economy. At the same time, the Parliament's majority expresses perplexity about actions and statements of certain political actors, which politically grew on the subject of the one-billion-dollar theft and corruption and presently see no problem in making alliance with those who stayed behind these unlawful deeds, criticized including by Moldova's development partners, a press release by the two formations reads. At a today's meeting, the parliamentary majority was informed about the Government's intention to renegotiate the agreement on crediting with Russia. The MPs pointed out the need to identify new financing sources. In this respect, they discussed the progress made on the conditions imposed by the EU for providing the second installment of the macro-financial assistance. The sides reiterated willingness to fulfill these conditions as a priority. (www.moldpres.md)

- May 14th, the Supreme Security Council (CSS) members today held a meeting, the agenda of which included four issues of topical importance; the one-billion-dollar theft, situation at the Chisinau International Airport, contraband, as well as the state triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to President Igor Dodon. *“On the period 2015-2019, as to the one-billion-dollar theft, more investigations were made; yet, according to all those present at the Security Council, most of them represented mimicry of the attempts to find the guilty people and return the state's money. Today, we considered all stages and I want to inform you, without coming up with details, that there is substantial progress as to the investigation of the bank fraud,”* Dodon said. He gave assurances that all guilty people would be called to account in the near future. Another

subject examined was focused on the Chisinau International Airport and the Avia Invest Company. According to the Head of state, efforts are made for the Airport to be returned to the exclusive management of the state. *“Colleagues from the Government informed that progress is made on branches which would allow cancellation of the contract with Avia Invest – infringements at the signing of the document, which represented reason for the opening of criminal files, inefficient contractual conditions, preferential conditions of monopoly and non-implementation of the investments plan, the company’s insolvency,”* the President noted. *“At present, Avia Invest has debts to the state estimated at tens of millions lei, the enterprise’s accounts are blocked or there is a point in the agreement on granting that, in case of the investor’s insolvency, the contract is automatically regarded cancelled,”* Dodon said. According to the President, *“the state’s institutions will firmly go on these subjects of national importance. We will get to the end – both in the case of the Airport and in the case of the one-billion-dollar theft.”* Referring to the contraband schemes, the Head of state specified that all risks had been analyzed on more categories of goods; tobacconist’s shops, alcohol, amber, financial means, anabolic substances, vehicles, etc. *“We discussed in detail and we saw where there are gaps and what must be changed in legislation, in order to prevent the contraband phenomenon,”* Dodon added. (www.moldpres.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The ruling coalition of PSRM and PDM reaffirmed its agreement to remain in power

ending rumors that the Government’s collapse is imminent. The President, Igor Dodon as the absolute dominant of state’s politics schedules the next presidential elections, most likely for November 1st, 2020. Moldova has become a field of the ongoing rivalry between the West (namely the EU and NATO) and Russia for influence. 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. Although the President Igor Dodon 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. Corruption, lack of transparency and accountability reign in public administration and state’s politics.



MONTENEGRO: May 11th, Ambassador of Serbia to Montenegro, Vladimir Bozovic, was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Podgorica tomorrow. Bozovic was called to come to the Ministry after he commented on social media on the song of Croatian singer, Marko Perkovic Thompson, which was broadcast on the Public Service of the Radio and Television of Montenegro. Bozovic wrote that it was necessary to establish individual responsibility and sanction it properly. *“While considering the act of broadcasting anti-Serbian and controversial singer in the Morning program inappropriate on the Day of Europe, I express my protest and regret. I welcome reaction and admission of guilt of the RTCG,”* Bozovic reacted.

Recently, Bozovic attended funeral of the historian Vlado Jovicevic, although National Coordination Body had banned gatherings on funerals. (www.cdm.me)

- May 14th, violent protests rocked several towns in Montenegro on Wednesday night after Police arrested a Serbian Orthodox Church Bishop and several priests for leading a religious procession in defiance of the Government ban on public gatherings because of the coronavirus. Police battled protesters in Pljevlja and Niksic with tear gas, leaving dozens of Police officers and protesters injured. Protests also took place in Budva, Berane and the capital, Podgorica. The protesters demanded the release of Bishop Joanikije of Niksic and seven other priests accused of conducting the illegal procession in the town. While some media accused the Police of using excessive force on protesters, the Police Directorate claimed that some of the protesters had thrown stones, wounding 22 Policemen. The Rector of the Cetinje school of theology, Gojko Perovic, accused the authorities of using excessive force. *“We call on them to stop their violent behavior towards peaceful and non-violent protests. It is clear that the injustice has exceeded every measure,”* Perovic said in a press release. Police arrested the Bishop and clergy on May 12th, 2020 and placed them in custody for 72 hours for violating the ban on public gatherings after they and leading Serbian Orthodox cleric in Montenegro, Metropolitan Amfilohije, led a procession in Niksic to celebrate St Vasilije’s Day, accompanied by thousands of believers. Large gatherings remain banned in Montenegro as part of efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus, however, and religious processions may only take place within places of worship. No

more than 20 people may gather in front of the said Church or place of worship. The detained priests face charges of violating health regulations by organizing the procession. Earlier on Wednesday, supporters of the Serbian Orthodox Church blocked a road in northern Montenegro in another protest, but Police broke the blockade with tear gas, arresting some of the protesters. Most opposition parties condemned the Police action, while civic activists warned that rising tensions could lead to more serious rioting. *“With an election campaign close and a social crisis, these tensions could create a very risky atmosphere. One angry head can lead to riots,”* Boris Raonic, from the Civic Alliance, told the daily newspaper Vijesti. The Montenegrin authorities have a history of rocky relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church, the largest faith group in the country, but which historically opposed the country’s separation from Serbia. Earlier this year, the Church organized weeks of street protests against a religious law that it said could strip it of its property. Montenegrin officials repeatedly denied the claims. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- May 14th, Civic Movement United Reform Action (Građanski Pokret Ujedinjena Reformska Akcija - GP URA) leader Dritan Abazovic said that the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) and the Democratic Front (Demokratski Front – DF) are consciously pushing Montenegro into conflicts. *“At a time when the country is still struggling with the global health crisis, the economy is on the verge of collapse, and tourism is facing the biggest challenge since it was counted as an economic branch, the Government, ruled by war*

speculators, is pursuing such irresponsible, reckless and unconstitutional policies. Only a retrograde, nationalist and professional opposition that never wants to be in power can serve that same corrupt elite sacrificing everything, even the blood of its citizens, in order to strengthen its own political rating. So we are not surprised that instead of a democratic country of the 21st century, we have become in the eyes of the international community, a state of soft dictatorship,” pointed out Abazovic, who reacted to the events of the previous days throughout the country. He stated that the calls of the authorities for solidarity and unity quickly replaced by the latest events. *“Montenegro is the only country in the world where someone like Ivica Stankovic can run the state Prosecutor's Office. How is it possible to explain that the corrupt Migo Stijepovic, synonymous with political corruption, was asked to come and give a statement for seven days, and that the clergy were arrested immediately during the night. At the same time, to be clear, I always support implementation of the law, without exception,”* Abazovic said. He personally and on behalf of the party, strongly condemned the today’s violence on the streets of Montenegrin cities, which occurred after the arrest of Bishop Joanikije of Niksic and several other church dignitaries. According to him, DPS has brought the country into the brink of an abyss, pushing it into constant debt, destroying the economy and creating a state brand of drug clans that have become globally known. (www.vijestu.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Civil turmoil is ongoing in Montenegro threatening state’s stability. Orthodox Church

clerics arrests and persecutions have divided the country’s population with politicians to warn for the threat of further escalation. Taking into consideration that the country will enter soon in pre-electoral period it could be assessed that polarization of situation is likely. There are concerns that coming autumn will be a hard one due to the COVID-19 consequences in the state’s economy. So the Government seeks to call for elections in late summer or beginning of autumn. Opposition looks divided without a common stance but there are several parties which will boycott the elections protesting for lack of democratic values, media freedom and establishment of an authoritarian regime by the ruling DPS. Relations between Montenegro and Serbia continue to move on the edge of tension, since Montenegrin Government accuses Serbia of intervening in its internal affairs. Corruption, smuggling (especially cigarettes) and money laundering are dominated in the country setting significant obstacles and risks for every investor. Such situation has strongly affected progress of accession negotiations with the EU. Montenegro 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. The coming elections in the country should be seen as a democratic stress test. The country focuses on strengthening its Armed Forces by purchasing modern equipment.



NORTH MACEDONIA: May 12th, North Macedonia political parties’ leaders did not reach an agreement on the date for the general elections, at the meeting in President’s

office today. leaders of Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) Zoran Zaev, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) Hristijan Mickoski, Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija – DUI) Ali Ahmeti, Alliance for Albanians (Алијанса за Албанците - AA) Zijadin Sela, Alternative (Alternativa) Afrim Gashi and Besa Movement (Lëvizja Besa – BESA) Bilal Kasami agreed only that health of citizens is of utmost importance and that they should gather next week to discuss the date for the elections. (www.meta.mk)

- May 15th, President Stevo Pendarovski expressed assurances that Bulgaria will not block North Macedonia from opening EU accession talks, despite repeated threats in that regard from top Bulgarian politicians. Bulgaria wants additional concessions in a number of historic and national identity issues before it will allow the opening of accession talks with North Macedonia that were expected by the end of the year. *“It is possible in theory that they block us, but I hope, and based on what I know about the thinking of their President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, I think they do not have an intention to block our accession talks. If there is an open blockade, a third party will get involved between us, and will try to mediate. The issue has to be resolved, you can drag it out but in the end it will have to be resolved. The sometimes radical statements from some Bulgarian politicians aside, nobody there disputes the current reality. They do*

not dispute the language, the nation, the ethnic background. All the Bulgarian side is saying is, let’s see how it was in the past. I think that can be a basis for talks,” Pendarovski said during a TV interview. Bulgaria wants that practically all heroes of the “*Macedonian past*,” at least those that the North Macedonia’s Government did not sign away to Greece with the Prespa treaty, are declared to have been ethnic Bulgarians. It also wants to make sure that the “*Macedonian language*” does not become an official EU language, as it considers it a mere western dialect of the Bulgarian language. Pendarovski recently warned that, if that is the Bulgarian red line, North Macedonia would be better off giving up on its EU accession talks. Today he backpedaled on that statement. *“When I said that, it was not a declaration that we are giving up on the EU. It is just our red line. After the elections I am sure we will build a national consensus on the issue,”* Pendarovski said. (www.republika.mk)

- May 16th, Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Vasko Gjurchinovski, for first time as a full-fledged member, took part in the 183rd regular session of the NATO Military Committee (MC), the senior military authority in the Alliance. At the virtual meeting, the Chiefs of the General Staff of the 30 member states discussed current operations, missions, activities and operational commitments to build stability and strengthen partnerships, according to the agenda. But what remains noticeable is that neither the new official name of North Macedonia nor that he is the Chief of the General Staff of the “*Army of the Republic of North Macedonia*” was written on the monitors, but it said “*MK-Skopje MOD.*” (www.republika.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Leaders of political parties did not achieve to agree on the elections day since the COVID-19 pandemic is considered as an active threat against voters' health. The SDSM pushes for parliamentary elections as soon as possible, even within summer claiming that the country should restore parliamentary order. On the other hand opposition urges for elections when health conditions will be safe for the citizens. Although the country has a caretaker Government situation is not stable since the Parliament has been dissolved and there is no elected Government to handle major state's issues. The Bulgaria – North Macedonia dispute is getting worse for the latter endangering the opening of accession negotiations with the EU and threatening the European perspective of the country. Moreover, it strengthens nationalistic rhetoric in North Macedonia giving spare place for populist voices amid pre-electoral atmosphere. However, it should be noted that North Macedonia is reluctant due to internal political reasons to fully implement the agreements with Greece and Bulgaria which have been set as preconditions by the EU for the country's European future. The country 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: May 13th, the Chamber of Deputies has approved, on Wednesday, the simple motion submitted by the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) against the Minister of Finance, Florin Citu.

The simple motion, titled “*The Citu virus has infected the national economy,*” was debated in plenary session on Monday. Voting “*for*” the motion were 166 Deputies, 94 were “*against*” and 28 abstained. Mortgaging the country’s finances must stop, Romania must be saved from the “*Vasile Citu virus,*” and the Minister of Finance must leave, reads the motion. “*More harmful than the effects of the pandemic, more contagious than the coronavirus and more lethal than the COVID-19 disease, the ‘Citu virus’ has almost completely destroyed the national economy. After almost two months of state of emergency, after countless stutters, deferrals and adjustments of regulatory acts, Finance Minister Florin Vasile Citu proved incapable to come up with effective support measures for the economy. Opinion polls show that 70 percent of the population believe that Romania could have avoided the coronavirus pandemic’s negative effects on the economy, had the Finance Ministry taken efficient measures to support businesses in due time. Put simply, 70% of the Romanians believe Minister Citu is a disaster for the economy! What a curse on this country – having the most disastrous Finance Minister in Romania’s history steer the economy during this most difficult time,*” the simple motion reads. The Social Democrats also mention that in the 6 months of governing and in the more than 50 days since the declaration of the state of emergency, no measures have been taken to “*avoid disaster.*” Finance Minister stated in the plenary meeting that the motion’s signatories are “*criminals,*” arguing that they “*used this unfortunate virus to promote their motion and political agenda.*” “*I am here because the Romanians must know that while the PNL [National Liberal Party] and I are successfully managing this crisis, the signatories of the motion*

are trying to stop us. I would like to remind you who the signatories of this motion are. They are those who gassed and beat innocent Romanians on August 10th. The next day they also blamed the same Romanians for coming to take down the Government. It was a coup. In my view, the signatories of this motion are criminals. Because they dared to blackmail this Government by threatening to reject in Parliament the extension of the state of emergency, in my opinion they played poker with Romanians' health, trying to blackmail even the President of Romania. For two months in which we implemented measures to revive the economy, they changed all these measures in Parliament in a criminal and populist way. I say criminals because if the proposals of these irresponsible persons had passed, they would have thrown Romania into economic chaos. But the most despicable thing they done in this motion is that, without any respect for Romanians, for those affected by this crisis, they have used this unfortunate virus, which has generated casualties in Romania and all over the world, to promote their motion and political agenda," Citu said, according to Agerpres. (www.nineoclock.ro)

- May 15th, the Government is determined to revive the defense industry and secure orders from the Romanian Armed Forces for production capacity in the domestic industry, Prime Minister Ludovic Orban said on Friday. "We are here to give a very serious message that the time when the Ministry of Defense, the Romanian Army did not take into account the needs of the defense industry has passed, that there is a very strong link between the Ministry of Defense, the Romanian Army and the Ministry of Economy and the armaments industry, that the Romanian Army

is determined to get involved in supporting the defense industry, both through acquisitions that are produced by Romanian factories, through involvement, including in the area of research and retooling. The presence here of the Defense and Economy Ministers it is the clearest proof that we are determined to revive the defense industry and to secure orders from the Romanian Army for the production capacities in the Romanian defense industry," said Orban, who paid a visit to the Cugir Mechanical Plant. The Prime Minister added that, along with him in Cugir, were the Vice Prime Minister Raluca Turcan and Minister of Defense Nicolae Ciuca, Transport Minister Lucian Bode and Economy Minister Virgil Popescu. Ciuca said on Friday that a large percentage of Romania's defense budget should be invested in the local industry, mentioning that there is a 10-year plan to equip the Armed Forces. "We have a plan for the next 10 years, so there is forecast and planning for both time and funds, so that the local defense industry can provide what the Army needs, and we are also in talks with the Ministry of Economy, with ROMARM, in order to identify all the other lines of collaboration, so that once again the 2% defense spending may get real, as we have committed ourselves under the governing program and also as undertaken at the level of the Ministry of National Defense, as much as possible. That will be true, but not to say starting tomorrow, but little by little, step by step, until the completion of this 10-year plan; we should have a higher percentage invested in the Romanian industry," Ciuca said. The Government wants for the Romanian defense industry to be involved as much as possible in endowing the Army, so that a higher percentage of the funds earmarked to defense can go to the relevant domestic industry,

Popescu has stated on Friday. He mentioned that, together with Ciuca, he will continue to carry out “more applied” discussions with the management of the two plants. *“I was at the Craiova Airplane Plant, we will go to other plants. (...) We truly want that the Romanian defense industry be involved as much as possible in endowing the Army. You will see that the defense industry will get moving, that the Romanian defense industry will change its face and start producing at the technological level which the Romanian Army needs,”* the Economy Minister said. (www.nineoclock.ro)

- May 17th, the Chairman of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE), Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, wrote a letter to the leaders of all parliamentary parties, requesting their support in view of debating in emergency procedure a draft decision regarding the obligation of the Government and President to present information on the way in which the crisis generated by the coronavirus epidemic was managed. *“ALDE believes that a state of emergency cannot justify the infringement of individual rights and liberties of Romanians, without them being informed and able to attack these decisions. As it is the first time when the state of emergency was instituted in Romania, it is necessary to see how the authorities acted, what preventive measures were taken before the institution of the state of emergency and we will all draw conclusions from the way in which this exceptional situation was managed. I believe it is important to ensure that, beyond limitations we have suffered, there were no slippages from the democratic rules that must remain valid even in an exceptional state. The rule of law is not suspended during the state of emergency. Mr.*

Chairmen, I hope the experts of the parties that you lead will bring their contribution to the draft law proposed by us and it will be forwarded in due time to Parliament in order to be debated and approved in emergency procedure,” the document signed by Popescu-Tariceanu shows. The draft law drawn up by ALDE experts regard the obligation of the authorities to present information, both to Parliament, and to Romanians, on the way in which the crisis generated by the coronavirus epidemic was managed, what kind of action was taken, as well as what rights and liberties were limited during the state of emergency. *“The right to life, and implicitly, the right to healthcare are rights enshrined in the Constitution of Romania, but their protection, following the declaration of a state of emergency, must not constitute an opportunity for abuse in regards to the other fundamental rights, and limiting such fundamental rights, even temporarily, must be very well justified. The draft regards the obligation of the Romanian President and of the Prime Minister to present in the plenum of the Parliament a report each on the way in which they acted, before and throughout the entire state of emergency in order to counteract the effects of the crisis generated by the coronavirus epidemic,”* the ALDE leader mentions. He added that this draft law also provides for the obligation to inform Romanians *“regarding what rights were limited, who ordered it, the reason and for how long have they applied these measures.”* *“By limiting rights and freedoms we understand freedom of circulation, the sanctity of the home, of private life, the secret nature of correspondence, etc., which were suspended on the basis of the Decree regarding the institution of the state of emergency on Romanian territory*

and of the military ordinances. In the context of the current legislation, the measures to limit some rights during the state of emergency are not explained after its conclusion. The Parliament, as the supreme legislative authority and guarantor of democracy, which exercises the function to control the Executive, is entitled to receive the explanation of the Government regarding the measures adopted, especially in what regards the limiting of rights, as are the persons affected by the measures with individual character entitled to receive explanations,” added the ALDE leader. (www.nineoclock.ro)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

PSD continues to file motion of no confidence against the PNL Government Ministers, but so far the ruling party is stable. The possibility of snap elections in the near future is not very likely and it seems that the President Klaus Iohannis and ruling PNL postponed their plans due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Romania enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries and the Alliance perceiving it as a threat against its national security. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: May 14th, answering the questions of the journalists about the accusation that “Serbia is waging a biological war against Montenegro,” he said that you can only shrug your shoulders at such claims. “I do not know what to tell you. I think it is normal not to use the Police against political opponents, if they do not

use violence. For us, this is a terribly difficult situation. On the one hand, you must not interfere in the internal affairs of another country. On the other hand, it is a question of the Serbian Orthodox Church and a part of our people,” he said and once again expressed his misunderstanding for the detention of Bishop Joanikije and the Serbian Orthodox Church priests. He had no answer to the research of the SeConS group, which presented data that about 200.000 people lost their jobs during the pandemic. “Which group? What are you, who are you? I do not know what to answer you. You can come out with the information that four million people have lost their jobs, even though there are not that many on the list of the employees,” he said. Vucic pointed out that three days ago he criticized certain municipal boards of the Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka - SNS), which called for mass rallies. He considers it irresponsible behavior. “I know that many people from the SNS were angry with me, but I think that there is no need for such a gathering,” Vucic said, commenting on the gathering of SNS supporters in front of the Assembly, while Government and opposition Deputies went on hunger strike. He added that showing superiority by gathering as many people as possible will not be the case. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 14th, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said on Thursday that officials Belgrade’s recognition of Kosovo is not being discussed as his political rivals have been claiming. “We are not talking about Kosovo with anyone, nor are there any talks, nor ideas, nor any solution on the table about anything,” Vucic told reporters during a visit to the Kolubara mining basin, adding that his political rivals have been accusing him of

intending to recognize Kosovo before the elections. *“I will always advocate peace but whenever I needed to demonstrate the strength and firmness of Serbia’s policies, I was the one to do that on the issue of Kosovo and the survival of our people,”* he said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 15th, the main Serbian opposition group said on Friday that it will not recognize the results of the June 21st, 2020 vote called by President Aleksandar Vucic nor the authorities that are formed based on it. *“We consider the un-free elections a violation of constitutional order and will not recognize their results. We will not recognize the authorities formed on the basis of those elections,”* the Alliance for Serbia (SzS) said in a written statement. It added that the minimum of conditions for free elections are not in place because of the coronavirus pandemic and that the vote on June 21st would be unsafe because it would endanger the health of the entire nation. *“The media darkness was never deeper. The state of emergency, imposed unconstitutionally, was used for unprecedented regime propaganda and repression. After that, the Serbian Parliament adopted unconstitutional changes to the election laws which change election conditions,”* the statement said and called the opposition, intellectuals and all citizens to boycott the June 21st elections. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Serbia is running its pre-electoral period amid tension which could be escalated at any moment. Opposition complaints for unfair and non transparent electoral procedures, while the EU urges ruling SNS to secure free and fair elections. Undoubtedly, the elections of June 21st, 2020 will be a democratic stress test for the country. It is

not still clear which parties will join and which will boycott the elections. Restart of dialogue with Kosovo is far since political uncertainty reigns in both Pristina and Belgrade. Although the EU and US push for dialogue restart it is assessed that it is very difficult to see tangible results before new stable Governments to be established in both, Kosovo and Serbia. Relations with Montenegro are in a sensitive phase due to the latter’s persecutions against the Orthodox Church clerics. Serbia has declared its intention to protect the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian population in the neighboring country. 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.



SLOVENIA: May 13th, the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) are conducting a month-long series of exercises aimed at training its members to operate in crisis situations and respond in natural and other disasters, which the SAF force Commander Mitja Skerbinc assessed as precisely what the Slovenian Army needs at the moment. In what is one of the largest exercises of the SAF ever, started on Monday, *“Leap 2020”* will take place in several locations around the country until June 19th, 2020. It will primarily deal with training for tactical procedures. (www.sta.si)

- May 14th, the need to nurture cross-border cooperation and the economy in the border regions was highlighted in a video-call featuring Minister for Slovenians Abroad Helena Jaklitsch and representatives of Slovenian business in Austria and Italy. Current activities, in particular those related to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, were presented, including efforts to deal with the impact on cross-border economic activities, the Government's Office for Slovenians Abroad said. (www.sta.si)

- May 14th, the Executive Committee of the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) issued a demand that the Government start working on DeSUS's priorities. Highlighting the priority coalition agreement commitments for DeSUS, the party demands that a task force be formed to draw up the act forming a demographic fund, a pension support fund in which state assets would be pooled to help finance public pensions. Party Head Aleksandra Pivec said the party was united and that the dismissal of its Secretary General was a part of a staffing reshuffle. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Migration is considered as a major threat against the country and additional measures will be taken for strengthening border control. Slovenia – Croatia dispute regarding the Piran Bay is still active but without tension or escalation due to COVID-19 pandemic. The Slovenian Foreign Minister made statements which show good will for improvement of bilateral relations between the two countries. 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.



TURKEY: May 12th, the Turkish Foreign Ministry strongly condemned the joint declaration by Greece, Egypt, France, Cyprus and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) claiming that Turkey's activities in the Eastern Mediterranean are “illegal.” “*The joint declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, Greece, Greek Cypriot administration, France and the UAE on the Eastern Mediterranean and Libya, is a case in point of the hypocrisy of a group of countries which are seeking regional chaos and instability through the policies they pursue and seeing no harm in sacrificing the democratic aspirations of people to the callous aggression of putschist dictators, and which have fallen into delirium, as their agendas are being disrupted by Turkey,*” Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hami Aksoy said in a statement. The Foreign Ministers of Greece, Egypt, France, the UAE and Cyprus held a videoconference meeting on Monday. A joint declaration released after the meeting criticized Turkey's activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. Aksoy blasted Greece and Cyprus for “relying on irrelevant non-regional actors,” which he said “can only be the legacy of a mentality of mandate and colonialism,” rather than engaging in dialogue with Turkey and “*Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus*” (the occupied north part of Cyprus) on the Eastern Mediterranean. “*The distortion of the steps taken by Turkey in order to protect its legitimate interests based on international law, through*

unfair and unlawful pretexts, is unacceptable under any circumstances,” Aksoy stressed. He said the rulers of Egypt do not protect the rights and interests of their own people, as they already preferred renouncing them. With respect to the UAE, Aksoy said the country has no concern about the Eastern Mediterranean but has united with the other countries in this regard as a result of animosity toward Turkey. Turkey's anti-terror operations in northern Syria also led France to attempt “to be the patron of this axis of malice,” he added. “We call on all these countries to act with common sense, in accordance with international law and practices. Peace and stability in our region can only be achieved through genuine and realistic dialogue and cooperation rather than attempting to create an axis of malice,” Aksoy added. The Libyan Government also condemned the joint declaration on the same day, saying that the statements were interfering in Libya's domestic affairs. “The memorandum of agreement signed between Turkey and Libya regarding the limitation of maritime jurisdiction and security, military cooperation, was signed between two Governments of states that have a coast on the Mediterranean. It does not concern a third party. We are astonished that the UAE, which does not have a coast on the Mediterranean, is on the joint declaration. It seems they have different intentions. The fact that the UAE is part of this is to support another country attacking the Libyan people,” a statement of Libya's Foreign Ministry said, adding that the countries signing the declaration were turning a blind eye to the crimes warlord Khalifa Haftar conducted on civilians and diplomatic missions. Meanwhile “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)” “Prime Minister” Ersin Tatar also criticized the countries

signing the declaration. “As Turkey spoils the interests in the region, some increase their dosage of hostility, yet this has no benefit for themselves nor for the region. While the whole world combats the novel coronavirus pandemic, some powers and their offshoots in the region try slyly further their plans of seizing the rights of the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean,” he said in a written statement on Tuesday. (www.dailysabah.com)

- May 12th, Turkey accused on Tuesday the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of bringing chaos to the Middle East through its interventions in Libya and Yemen, allegations which are likely to inflame tensions between regional rivals. Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu was responding to criticism of Turkey's role in the Libyan conflict, where it has deployed military personnel to support the internationally recognized legitimate Government in Tripoli. The UAE and Egypt, which back the forces of putschist General Khalifa Haftar trying to storm the Libyan capital, issued a joint statement with Greece, Cyprus and France on Monday condemning “Turkey's military interference in Libya.” Cavusoglu told in a televised interview that the UAE, along with Egypt and other countries he did not name, were “trying to destabilize the whole region,” but he singled out Abu Dhabi for particular criticism. “If you are asking who is destabilizing this region, who is bringing chaos, then we would say Abu Dhabi without any hesitation,” he said. “It is a reality that they are the force that has unsettled Libya and destroyed Yemen,” he claimed. Ties between Turkey and the UAE have been strained by Ankara's support for Qatar after four Arab countries including the UAE imposed sanctions in Doha in 2017. In Libya, where the UN says it has

supplied aircraft and military vehicles to Haftar, the UAE called on all parties last month to commit to a UN-supervised political process to end the war. The UAE was also a leading power in an alliance which intervened in Yemen five years ago against the Iran-aligned Houthi movement. It reduced its presence in Yemen last year but remains a member of that alliance. Cavusoglu also accused the UAE of supporting extremist Al Shabab militants in Somalia, where Turkey has a military base and is training Somali troops. He made his comments after the Foreign Ministry in Ankara condemned Monday's statement from five countries, including France, which he accused of "*attempting to be the patron of this axis of malice.*" In another statement, Turkey's ruling party Spokesman Omer Celik warned putschist Haftar that any attack on Turkish missions in Libya by his forces can expect a military response. "*We are clearly saying that, if our mission in Libya is attacked in any way, we will view Haftar's forces as legitimate targets,*" Celik told reporters amid a party board meeting by video link. On Sunday, Turkey's Foreign Ministry said that Haftar's attacks targeting diplomatic missions, including the Turkish Embassy in the capital Tripoli, the Mitiga Airport, civilian airplanes preparing to take off, and other civilian infrastructure, constituted a war crime. Haftar, the leader of an illegal armed force that has taken swathes of eastern Libya, has since the beginning of May intensified attacks on civilians, though the Libyan Army has recently gained the advantage and inflicted severe losses on his militant groups. Libya's Government has been under attack by Haftar's forces since April 2019, with more than 1,000 killed in the violence. The Government launched Operation "*Peace Storm*" on March 26th, 2020 to counter attacks on

the capital. Following the ouster of late ruler Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya's Government was founded in 2015 under an UN-led political agreement. (www.dailysabah.com)

- May 15th, the recently embattled Turkish lira edged up on Friday and held gains from late Thursday following reports that officials held talks with counterparts in Tokyo, London and elsewhere over new possible foreign funding. The lira, which hit a record low of 7.269 last week, stood at 6.917 against the dollar at 08:47 GMT, after data showed that measures taken to curb the coronavirus pandemic weighed heavily on the fiscal budget and on housing sales. Treasury and Central Bank officials have held bilateral talks in recent days with counterparts from Japan and the United Kingdom on setting up currency swap lines, and with Qatar and China on expanding existing facilities, Reuters news agency reported on Thursday, citing officials. Cevdet Yilmaz, the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) Deputy Chairman for foreign affairs, confirmed that Turkey is seeking swap agreements. "*We are having negotiations with different Central Banks for swap opportunities,*" he told a panel discussion on Thursday, adding "*It is not only the US, there are also other countries.*" He did not elaborate further on details. The push comes after the lira has fallen under severe pressure, limiting Ankara's capacity to address concerns over its depleted foreign reserves and hefty debt obligations. An official told Reuters that Turkey was feeling confident after talks. But it was unclear how close it may be to securing any deals as the coronavirus pandemic stretches Governments and Central Banks like never before. Turkey's Treasury Ministry, Japan's

Finance Ministry and the Bank of England declined to comment. The People's Bank of China did not respond to Reuters' faxed request for comment. Qatar's Government media office did not respond to a Reuters query about expanding the swaps with Ankara. If Turkey cannot secure tens of billions of dollars in funding, analysts say it risks a currency spiral similar to 2018, when the lira briefly shed half its value in a crisis that shook emerging markets. The Government has said its forex buffer is adequate. This week, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan blamed the lira's fall on *"those who think they can destroy our economy, put shackles on our feet, corner us by using financial institutions abroad."* The diplomatic effort comes as the coronavirus pandemic is expected to trigger a recession. It suggests Turkey is looking beyond its preferred source of funding, the US Federal Reserve, and may have to consider tougher decisions on interest rates or options it has dismissed, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) assistance or capital controls, investors say. *"Talks are in a better position especially with Qatar, China and Britain,"* said a senior official, who requested anonymity. *"I am optimistic that a certain amount of resources will be provided"* and an agreement should *"not take too long,"* he added. Two other officials said Turkey reached out to Japanese representatives about possible funding, with one adding that talks need to speed up if a swap line is to be secured. The Turkish Central Bank's net foreign currency reserves have dropped to 26 billion US dollars from 40 billion US dollars this year. Bankers say that was largely due to state lenders selling some 30 billion US dollars in FX markets to support lira, which has nonetheless fallen 15% this year. The country's 12-month foreign debt obligations are 168 billion US

dollars, with about half due by August, while disappearing tourism income has inflated its monthly current account deficit to nearly 5 billion US dollars. *"I do not really see how Turkey can navigate this period, especially considering their external vulnerabilities,"* said Shamaila Khan, Director of emerging markets debt at AllianceBernstein in New York. Turkey has underestimated its risks *"unfortunately for months now"* said Khan, who was among hundreds of investors on a conference call with the finance and Treasury Minister, Berat Albayrak, last week. Albayrak said reserves are adequate and he was optimistic about negotiating new funding with fellow G20 nations and trade partners, according to participants and a brief Ministry summary. He singled out countries with which Turkey has large trade deficits and promised an update to existing swap lines, one investor said. Turkey has currency swap facilities worth 1.7 billion US dollars with China and 5 billion US dollars with Qatar. A Japanese Government official said Tokyo has no plan for now beyond monitoring the lira, but added the Group of Seven (G7) countries or the International Monetary Fund would rescue Turkey *"if it morphs into a real crisis."* Any significant weakening of the lira beyond 7 per dollar, where it has stabilized, could erode support for Erdogan, whose party lost local elections last year on the heels of the 2018 crisis that sent inflation and unemployment soaring. His Government has imposed tighter limits on local bank FX trading and opened investigations into global firms UBS, Citigroup and BNP Paribas. Investors and bankers say it would need to act quickly to restore confidence if companies begin missing foreign debt payments or Turks start withdrawing deposits. They say rate hikes are one avenue, followed by IMF funding - an option both

Erdogan and Albayrak have dismissed. “*This feels like a rerun of the last lira crisis,*” said Win Thin, global head of currency strategy at Brown Brothers Harriman. “*Surprisingly little has changed fundamentally in the nearly two years that have passed (except policies) that make it even harder to invest in Turkey,*” Thin said. Some investors and bankers said only in a worst-case scenario would Turkey adopt capital controls, such as limits on transfers or withdrawals, which would harm its market credibility. (www.aljazeera.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkish economy is currently the “big patient” reaching a critical point where a new crisis (similar to that of 2018) is not unlikely. Turkish authorities work hard cooperating with Qatar, China, United Kingdom and Japan for funding the harmed economy. It is notable that Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his collaborators try to avoid by any way support by the IMF. It should not be overlooked that Turkey develops alternatives for rescuing its economy moving far from traditional assistances such as the IMF or the US Federal Reserve. In the field of external policy, it seems that Turkey has stabilized the Syrian front, while Libyan forces of Fayeze al-Sarraj backed by Turkey are gaining ground against General Khalifa Haftar. Turkey invests significant national interests in Libyan soil and its strategic alliance with Sarraj strengthens Turkish presence in Eastern Mediterranean Sea providing strategic depth in the country. One should follow very carefully the harsh rivalry between Turkey and UAE which is behind several regional fronts (for instance, Libya) and it may affect Turkish policy in Middle East and North Africa. Turkey maintains its claims in the Aegean

Sea and Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone violating constantly their sovereign rights. In the east Mediterranean front, Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in the region and is expected to react violently if balance of power is jeopardized. 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. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will set the base to become a regional military super power. Without any question, Turkey has the characteristics of a regional superpower and it tries to act like one.

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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.*