



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE

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ALBANIA: May 11th according to a new report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime's (GI-TOC) Observatory of Illicit Economies in South-Eastern Europe (SEE-Obs), Albania features as a "hotspot" for Drugs, People Smuggling, and Money Laundering. (www.exit.al)

- May 12th, leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD), Lulzim Basha, has launched a fresh national tour to meet with local party officials and supporters following the April 25th, 2021 election campaign tour. Starting with meetings in Durres on Tuesday, Basha stated that his party is not going to recognize the election results. (www.exit.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Despite the clean victory of PS in the parliamentary elections of April 25th, 2021, political tension and instability is maintained in the country. The Government is seeking the dismissal of the Albanian President, Ilir Meta; an action which unveils political motives. On the other hand, it is a fact that Meta was strongly involved in internal politics and pre-electoral campaign, avoiding to remain above political affiliation and interests. Dismissal of the President (which is very likely) will confirm the democratic deficit and the institutional crisis in the country. The Prime Minister, Edi Rama feels powerful, fully controlling Albanian politics. Instead of narrow minded political interests, the new Government should focus on state's reforms, strengthening rule of law, public administration's transparency and accountability, fight against corruption, organized crime and money

laundering. The route towards the EU is delayed due to low performances of the country in critical state reforms.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

May 10th, Bosnia and Herzegovina is hosting for the first time a large-scale military exercise in which the US Armed Forces and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina will check their readiness to respond to potential attacks. The "Swift response 21" exercise is being carried out at 30 locations across Europe, including BiH, from May 17th to June 2nd, 2021. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- May 12th, it would be possible to mobilize the army of Bosnia's Republika Srpska (RS) entity again very quickly, the Chairman of BiH's tripartite Presidency, Milorad Dodik, said as he congratulated the Day of the Army of Republika Srpska on Wednesday. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bosnia appears as the weakest link in Southeastern Europe and the most vulnerable in destabilization. It is the international community namely the EU and US which keep alive this country. With a problematic decision-making process, with hatred and mistrust between the state's entities, with a weak economy and with external stakeholders to intervene in internal affairs, Bosnia could become a source of tension and conflict. Besides, Bosnian Serb entity openly advocates in favor of secession, promoting a nationalist rhetoric. None should forget that Bosnia was created to end a war and the Dayton peace agreement achieved its goal; there is no doubt about that. But the accord should be

amended urgently in order to resolve all open issues. NATO is engaged with Bosnia more and more seeking to bring the country closer to the Alliance, reducing other external influence. Bosnia came closer to NATO with the consent of Republika Srpska and this is notable. Despite voices of dissolution of Bosnia the scenario is far from reality. A potential dissolution of the country could provoke a dominos of conflicts in the wider region of Southeastern Europe threatening its stability and peace. Bosnia is far from joining the EU since the country suffers from corruption, absence of rule of law, difficulties in respect of human rights, weak public administration, democratic deficit and its economic performance is one of the lowest in Europe.



BULGARIA: May 10th, there is no ideological tension between Russia and Bulgaria, but their relations in the last two years are in a period of diplomatic opposition, the Russian Ambassador to Sofia Eleonora Mitrofanova stated on bTV. (www.novinite.com)

- May 11th, press office of the Bulgarian presidency announced that the President Rumen Radev has issued an order dissolving the 45th National Assembly effective on May 12th, 2021. The Head of state is scheduling snap general elections for July 11th, 2021. (www.novinite.com)



The new caretaker Bulgarian Government
(Photo source: www.gov.bg)

- May 12th, the Ministers of the third cabinet headed by Boyko Borisov handed over power to the caretaker Government appointed by decree of President Rumen Radev. (www.novinite.com)

- May 13th, Bulgaria has said it will not change its opposition to North Macedonia's accession to the EU following a meeting between Bulgaria's new caretaker Foreign Minister Svetlan Stoev and Deputy Prime Minister for Judicial Reform Ekaterina Zaharieva. (www.novinite.com)

- May 16th, in his first interview since the appointment of a caretaker cabinet, President Rumen Radev expressed his conviction that *"the statehood will be restore"* despite *"the bombs planted by the Government of Boyko Borissov."* (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bulgaria has a caretaker Government appointed by the President Rumen Radev. The Government is responsible to hold early elections on July 11th, 2021. Political instability and uncertainty is maintained in the country since the caretaker Government enjoys limited executive competences. It is notable that Radev acts more or less as a party leader, condemning and criticizing the outgoing GERB Government and the Prime Minister Boyko Borissov. It could be said that Radev has failed to act as the President of whole Bulgarians distanced from parties' disputes. Regarding the Bulgaria – North Macedonia dispute on historic and linguistic issues, the new Government made clear that it is not authorized to change decision of the previous elected Government. In other words there is not much to expect until the coming autumn. Moscow and Sofia relations are considered tense.

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



CROATIA: May 10th, Croatia's Foreign Minister, Gordan Grlic-Radman speaking in Brussels ahead of a discussion of the EU Ministers on Western Balkans, underlined the importance of the concept of three constituent peoples which is key to the functioning, the stability and the European journey of that country. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- May 13th, the Government rejected all claims in the motion for a no-confidence vote in Health Minister Vili Beros, which was submitted with the support of 41 opposition lawmakers. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- May 13th, the public row between the Croatian President Zoran Milanovic, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and Parliament Speaker Gordan Jandrokovic over the election of a new Supreme Court Chief Justice continued on Thursday. Milanovic, who supports Dzurđzevic's candidacy, today accused Government of unconstitutional interference in the election of the Supreme Court Chief Justice (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- May 16th, a slightly higher number of voters went to the polling stations by afternoon on Sunday than four years ago, despite the coronavirus pandemic and the consequences of the devastating earthquakes that struck Croatia last year. By 4.30 pm, 35.54% of voters had cast their ballots in local elections, compared to

35.15% in 2017, the State Election Commission said (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

With the local elections ahead, opposition raised its tones against the Government, seeking to rally their voters. Motion of no-confidence against the Health Minister, Vili Beros and public dispute between the President, Zoran Milanovic and Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic over the election of the new head of the Supreme Court, could be considered as pre-electoral actions. Nevertheless, the Government is stable. Croatia pays special attention on the status of the Bosnian Croats in neighboring Bosnia pushing for the change of the electoral law. In short, Zagreb exercises a very active policy in Bosnia seeking to maintain significant influence. Accession in the Schengen Zone and Eurozone is a strategic goal since it will benefit the state regarding economy, trade, and security. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: - May 11th, the loans on the books of EU banks that remain under long-running moratoria are more likely to underperform, with credit quality particularly uncertain in Cyprus, Italy, Portugal and Hungary, Moody's Investors Service said in a report published Tuesday. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 12th, almost 660 people from 15 political parties, as well as 8 independents, officially submitted their candidacies on Wednesday, competing for one of Parliament's 56 seats during

the May 30th, 2021 elections. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 12th, economic activity in Cyprus contracted sharply in 2020, due to the Covid-19 crisis. According to the European Commission, the economy shrank by 5.1% in 2020. It is forecast to grow by 3.1% and 3.8% in 2021 and 2022. Unemployment was 7.6% in 2020 and is seen at 7.5% in 2021 and 7.2% in 2022. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 13th, President Nicos Anastasiades has sent letters to the UN Secretary-General, the UN Security Council's permanent and non-permanent members, EU institutions as well as EU heads of state and Government briefing them on developments of the Cyprus issue. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

In the echo of the 5+1 informal meeting in Geneva the President, Nikos Anastasiades has briefed via a letter the EU leaders, the UN Secretary-General and the UN Security Council permanent members about his views on the Cyprus issue. It is notable that Anastasiades pushes the UN for a second round of informal talks the sooner, implying that the Turkish Cypriot community's and Turkey's stance would affect the Cypriot stance on EU – Turkey relations' upgrade which will be discussed in June in Brussels. None should forget that Anastasiades advocates in favor of a solution plan which has been rejected by the Cypriot people 17 years ago ("Anan" plan) in a referendum (76% rejected the plan, while 24 voted in favor). The Cypriot President strongly promotes the tactic of confidence measures building between Cyprus

and the Turkish Cypriot community underlying that the country will not tolerate any future violation of its sovereign rights. Despite de-escalation of tension with Turkey, the Cypriot energy plans have got stuck and no further progress was recorded last two years. It is assessed that international energy giants have withdrawn their interest from Cyprus until the Cypriot question is resolved ensuring peace and stability in the island. The country is moving towards parliamentary elections scheduled for May 30th, 2021. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize). As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: May 10th, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and other Government officials are denying persistent rumors that there will be an early election in the fall. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 12th, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on Wednesday said Greece was pursuing a six-pronged policy on migration aimed at combining protection of national sovereignty and international law with respect for humanitarian principles and refugee rights. Mitsotakis outlined the six principles of the policy, namely protection of the country's sea and land borders; the distinction between refugees and economic migrants; an effective return policy of those who are not eligible for international protection; the establishment of closed and well-monitored facilities; greater transparency in the operation of non-government organizations (NGOs); and,

finally, an effective integration policy for recognized refugees. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 12th, the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner has urged Greece to end pushbacks of asylum-seekers on its borders, a practice that Athens denies carrying out. (www.reuters.com)

- May 12th, Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos said that the extension of the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA) between Greece and the US will be completed within the next couple of months. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 14th, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has accepted an invitation by his Greek counterpart to visit Athens, Nikos Dendias said at the Delphi Economic Forum VI in Athens on Friday, though no specific date has been agreed on. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 15th, European Parliament lawmaker Yiannis Lagos, who was convicted as a leading member in the trial of neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party last year, landed in Athens on Saturday afternoon, following his extradition from Belgium earlier this week. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 15th, Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos pushed back against renewed Turkish calls for Greece to demilitarize its islands, stressing that it "cannot demilitarize areas that are under threat." (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

Tension with Turkey has eased, although the latter insists on maintaining provocative rhetoric.

Athens is encouraging dialogue with Ankara, underlying that the latter should avoid provocations in the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea. A visit of the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu in Athens is scheduled for the near future, since the two countries continue the exploratory talks following the 2020 crisis. The latest crisis with Turkey has «woken up» Greece which realized that the balance of power in the Aegean is overturning in favor of Ankara. Thus the country announced an ambitious armament project seeking to strengthen its Armed Forces. The country has purchased 18 4th generation fighter jets RAFALE, while it upgrades 84 F-16 jets to the VIPER version; the most advanced version in whole Europe. By these two intelligent moves Greece could secure air superiority in the region for next years. In the Navy, Athens is negotiating the purchase of 3 or 4 modern frigates which will enter the country in the new age of warships. The French BELHARRA, the US MMSC, the Dutch SIGMA 11515HN, the British type 31 Arrowhead, the Italian FREMM and the German A-200 are candidates for the new frigate of the Hellenic Navy. High rank Navy officers are in favor of the French vessel due to its high operational performances but there is much pressure by the US administration for the MMSC. Apart from the armament projects, Greece has developed a multilateral diplomatic activity, building strong relations with regional states. Moreover, Athens has strengthened its relation and cooperation with the US (taking in advantage the low level of relations between Ankara and Washington). The illegal migration remains a major problem for the country, although migrants' flows have drastically reduced last two years. The Government has sealed the borders, but migrants in the Aegean islands and in the

mainland set a security, administrative and economic problem.



KOSOVO: May 12th, former Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said that he prepared a law suit against Serbia during his term in office. “Kurti’s Government has the completed job which was done in the best possible way under my leadership,” Haradinaj said (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 14th, an unnamed NATO official told the Euractive portal on Friday that the Alliance remains committed providing a secure environment for all communities in Kosovo. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti’s intention to file charges against Serbia for genocide confirms his commitment on cutting communication ties with Belgrade. From the very first moment of his election Kurti underlined that he actually does not believe in the dialogue process expressing a rather radical position that Serbia should recognize Kosovo without any further talk or compromise. However, Kurti enjoys support and acceptance from the Kosovo voters due to his radical views. Under such conditions is rather unlikely to see progress in the negotiation process in the near future. On the contrary, it would not be a surprise to watch tension between Kosovo Albanians and the Kosovo Serb community. Kosovo status remains unresolved affecting its stability and growth. Its Euro-Atlantic future is questioned and prospects are not very optimistic. Normalization of relations with Serbia is primarily in Kosovo’s favor. Kosovo needs urgently institutional reforms

especially in the fields of economy, rule of law, public administration, justice and democratic rule. Organized crime, corruption, money laundering, weak public administration, absence of rule of law, controlled justice, transactions between politicians and criminals are persistent “open sores” for Kosovo. As long as Kosovo status is undefined it will suffer from restricted sovereignty and political instability and uncertainty.



MOLDOVA: May 14th, application to outlaw the Shor (Partidul ȘOR) party filed to the Constitutional Court by the MPs of the Party Dignity and Truth Platform Political Party (Partidul Politic Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr – PPDA) was rejected as inadmissible. (www.ipn.md)

- May 15th, a number of laws “with major problems” that were adopted by the Parliament before its dissolution were remitted back by the President Maia Sandu to the legislative body for being examined and amended so as to eliminate the shortcomings they contain or to withdraw them. (www.ipn.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although snap parliamentary elections have been scheduled in Moldova on July 11th, 2021, political instability is maintained. Actually, there is no Government which could decide for a series of major challenges and problems of the country. Moldovan society is suffering from poverty and lack of social care. Life is getting more and more expensive, while vaccination process against COVID-19 is still in its initial stage. Political parties are interested only for political control of

state's politics and access to power. Moldova has a significant geostrategic role due to its geographical location next to Ukraine and Russia. Moscow considers it in its own sphere of influence and it will not allow Moldova's accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures. In other words access of NATO troops in Moldova poses a direct threat against Russian security. In this context, it would be interesting to see the Russian reaction if a pro-western Government would be established in the country after the elections (a very likely scenario). The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: May 11th, high-ranking Government officials and representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church are supposed to sign a fundamental agreement. It has long been speculated whether the content of the agreement should be revealed to the public before signing and discussed in the Parliament of Montenegro as well. The President of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic, says it is important that Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic's Government pledges itself to have an agreement which must not be at the expense of Montenegro's national interests. (www.cdm.me)

- May 12th, the Parliament of Montenegro has adopted the amendments to the Law on the State Prosecutor's Office, despite the unfavorable opinion of the Venice Commission. Today's vote was boycotted by opposition MPs. (www.cdm.me)

- May 15th, Montenegro's Prime Minister, Zdravko Krivokapic, met with the special EU representative for the Belgrade -

Pristina dialogue and other Western Balkans issues, Miroslav Lajcak, and pointed out that a dynamic communication with EU representatives and member states best confirmed the Government's commitment to become the next EU member. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

Despite its anti-western "origins," the Montenegrin Government has achieved to stabilize political situation in the country. The President Milo Djukanovic "mechanism" (includes state officials and institutions, media, security institutions, justice etc) continues to attack the ruling coalition seeking to destabilize it. It enjoys support by the European and US structures. However, the Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic and his Government appear a more pro-European profile lately. It is estimated that the need for "survival" and the Chinese loan debt have played a crucial role in this turn. Despite such turn, Montenegro is considered as a "vulnerable link" of the Balkan region in Russian influence. Montenegro needs concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. The amendment of the law on state's Prosecutor office against the Venice Commission opinion might become a source of "conflict" with the EU.



NORTH MACEDONIA: May 11th, EU leaders were clear in talks with the Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev during his visit to Brussels that North Macedonia cannot start negotiations if it does not resolve the dispute with Bulgaria, and

if that does not happen, it is possible to start accession negotiations only with Albania. (www.republika.mk)



Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev met with the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen

(Photo source: www.vlada.mk)

- May 12th, after it was revealed that the deputy leaders of the Montenegrin Skaljarski gang, Igor Dedovic and Stevan Stamatovic, had North Macedonian passports, it became clear that the entire leadership of this criminal group has passports from our country. (www.republika.mk)

- May 14th, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry announced that its caretaker Minister Svetlan Stoev is ready to have a phone conversation with his North Macedonian counterpart Bujar Osmani, but noted that not much will change in the coming months. Bulgaria is without a Government after the inconclusive April elections and will be led by a caretaker Government until the next election this summer. (www.republika.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The ruling coalition maintains a fragile majority in the Parliament which makes it vulnerable to political blackmails. Trying to maintain public acceptance and to compete with VMRO-DPMNE,

ruling SDSM follows a more “patriotic” stance. Announcement of Brussels that North Macedonia will not start accession negotiations with the EU unless the dispute with Bulgaria is resolved was a big disappointment for Skopje. The Government’s goal to start accession negotiations in June is removed, since Bulgaria faces political instability and it is rather unlikely to see a compromise between the two countries until the coming autumn. Leaks of EU officials that Albania will start accession negotiations separately of North Macedonia will be a defeat for the latter with political consequences for SDSM. The Government is not effective in fighting corruption and organized crime; the two “sores” of the country. Relations of state’s top officials with organized crime and the establishment of the rule of law are other major challenges for North Macedonia towards its route to the European family.



ROMANIA: May 11th, President Klaus Iohannis said in a joint statement with Polish counterpart Andrzej Duda at the end of the B9 Summit that the Black Sea security situation is worrying, which is why NATO must continue to strengthen its deterrence and defense position, especially on the Eastern Flank, in a unitary and coherent manner. (www.nineoclock.ro)

- May 12th, Russia expelled a Romanian diplomat in response to the “unjustified decision” of Bucharest, which on April 26th, 2021 declared persona non grata the Military Attaché of the Russian Embassy in Bucharest. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Ruling coalition has stabilized its power bringing also stability in internal political scene. Romania enjoys advanced upgrade in the US and NATO strategic and operational planning due to its geographical position located close to Russia. One should keep in mind that Romania is the Eastern bastion of NATO in a rather unstable region. The Alliance keeps strengthening its presence in Romania by deploying modern weapons and troops. Russia is annoyed by Romania's upgrade as an advanced base of the Alliance, which is considered as a direct threat against Moscow. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO.



SERBIA: May 10th, the President Aleksandar Vucic, head of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka - SNS) agreed on Monday with Aleksandar Sagic, the nationalist Serbian Patriotic Alliance (Srpski Patriotski Savez – SPAS) movement's President, to unite in one organization. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 10th, contracts on loans worth a total of 234.6 million Euros were signed in Belgrade on Monday by representatives of the Serbian Government, Agence française de développement (AFD) and the World Bank to upgrade the public sector, help with green recovery and modernize railways. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 10th, EU Ambassador Sem Fabrizi said on Monday that Serbia urgently needs to implement rule of law reforms to achieve progress towards EU membership. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 11th, the EU Council agreed to apply the revised enlargement methodology to the accession negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia after both candidate countries expressed their acceptance. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 11th, the Head of Serbia's Government Office for Kosovo, Petar Petkovic told the new OSCE mission in Pristina Chief Michael Davenport that Kosovo's failure to form the agreed Community of Serb Municipalities (CSM) was a huge obstacle to the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations. (www.rs.n1info.com).

- May 13th, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said that one of the great powers is launching a demand to withdraw KFOR and UNMIK, adding that he will ask NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to try to prevent their withdrawal from Kosovo. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 14th, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic spoke out on Friday against frozen conflicts and in favor of the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue under the EU auspices. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 14th, Serbia's Interior Minister Aleksandar Vulin said that Moscow was ready to continue cooperation with Belgrade in fighting organized crime and terrorism. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling SNS fully controls internal politics strengthening its power. Opposition appears weak and divided. Belgrade appears committed in the negotiation process with Prishtina under the EU auspices. Serbia takes in advantage Kosovo's reluctance towards dialogue, to appear as a credible interlocutor who seeks to establish peace

and stability in the region. The President Aleksandar Vucic is skillfully balancing between the west, Russia and China, declaring the doctrine of “neutrality” as a tool of peace and stability. Corruption, organized crime, public administration accountability, media freedom are the main internal challenges for the country. The EU pushes Belgrade to accelerate state;s reforms especially in the fields of rule of law, public administration, democratic rule and human rights. Serbian route towards the EU accession has got stuck last years due to Belgrade’s inability to implement the necessary reforms. 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 10th, Foreign Minister Anze Logar told the commercial broadcaster POP TV that Slovenia would be well prepared to preside the Council of the EU. (www.sta.si)

- May 11th, the parliamentary Defense Committee discussed an amended national defense plan for 2018 - 2023 that would allow for the purchase of a tactical transport aircraft for the Army, and two helicopters for the Special Forces. The procedure to purchase the plane will start this year and for the helicopters by 2023. Opposition Left (Levica) criticized the planned purchases. (www.sta.si)

- May 12th, the shipment of 38 Oshkosh light tactical vehicles for the Slovenian Armed Forces arrived at the Koper port on Tuesday. Slovenia purchased the four-wheeled vehicles from the US under a Government-to-Government deal signed on November 12th, 2018, the Defense Ministry

said. The purchase comprises 38 JLTV 4x4 vehicles fitted with M153 Kongsberg weapon station. (www.sta.si)

- May 12th, Slovenia expects to be invited to a summit of MED7, a group of seven Mediterranean EU countries, this autumn, Foreign Minister Anze Logar said as he answered an MP question about the country’s plans to join MED7. He told the parliamentary Foreign Policy Committee he had received confirmation as he attended a session of the EU Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on Monday. (www.sta.si)

- May 14th, Slovenia has a new concept of basic training for the Slovenian Armed Forces, designed as a single entry point for those interested in either voluntary or professional service. For the whole 13 weeks of training, recruits will get pay of roughly 3,200 Euros. Defense Minister Matej Tonin said a modern army requires stable financing and more staff. Financing has been secured, while the new training system, which will be launched in July, is expected to increase the inflow of potential staff. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The Janez Jansa’s minority Government enjoys fragile stability but it is vulnerable in any future crisis. The ruling coalition could collapse at any time bringing Slovenia back to political instability. However, the minority Government of Slovenia is ready to take over the EU presidency for the next semester (July 1st – December 31st, 2021). Ljubljana will lead the European family in the echo of the notorious non-paper for the Western Balkans’ border change which was rejected from everybody including Balkan

countries and the international community. It is not still clear if there was such a paper and who launched it. The country pays special attention for improving situation in the Slovenian Armed Forces, since they are incapable for war operations; a major problem for the state's defense and security capacity. The state pays special attention in upgrading the Armed Forces capabilities and in this context has approved a 780 million Euros armament project aiming to modernize them. Procurement of transport aircrafts and helicopters has been set as a priority.



TURKEY: May 10th, Turkey's Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu has arrived in Saudi Arabia for talks; his first trip since journalist Jamal Khashoggi's 2018 murder in Istanbul worsened relations between both countries. Mevlut Cavusoglu's visit, apparently aimed at mending ties with Riyadh. (www.aljazeera.com)



Meeting of Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu with his Saudi Arabian counterpart Faisal bin Farhan in Riyadh
(Photo source: www.mfa.gov.tr)

- May 10th, Turkish security forces killed at least 19 PKK militants in two separate counterterrorism operations at home and in northern Iraq, the Interior and Defense Ministries announced. (www.dailysabah.com)

- May 12th, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has told Russian President Vladimir Putin that the international community should "give Israel a strong and deterrent lesson" over its conduct towards the Palestinians. (www.aljazeera.com)

- May 14th, Turkey's Karpowership, which provides electricity to Lebanon from two barges, said it was shutting down supplies over payment arrears and a legal threat to its vessels amid the country's economic crisis. (www.aljazeera.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey continues its efforts to overturn bad relations with neighboring countries. Following Egypt, Ankara approaches Saudi Arabia. Turkish – Saudi Arabian relations have been badly damaged back in 2018 when the Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi was murdered in the Kingdom's consulate in Istanbul. Turkey is seeking to improve relations with regional states which hold warm relations with the US in an effort to maintain its influence in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and to promote its strategic interests in the region. Besides, Ankara and Washington continue their deteriorated relations although the two countries will always keep open channels of communication. Turkey will never leave the US sphere of influence, since such a change could threaten the Eurasian security system. The President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan attacks on permanent basis on Israel seeking to gain acceptance and respect by the Muslim world. However, it is not a secret that Erdogan wishes normalization of relations with Tel Aviv. Turkish Lira remains weak exposing the country's economy into risks. The PKK militants consist a permanent threat of Turkish security.


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


www.hermesresearch.eu


email: info@hermesresearch.eu


Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas


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.*