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SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: June 13th, the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) leader, Lulzim Basha, declared that the country is facing an extraordinary situation, and he accused Edi Rama of coming to power with stolen votes. *“Elections of 2017 were dictated by organized crime, by a massive threat made to the voters and supporters of the opposition, from the Avdylaj in Shijak, to the Shullazi in Tirana. From the Baraj in Shkoder to the Habilaj in Vlore,”* Basha declared. *“This is the story of a man that connected his fate with the organized crime and killers. He was used to dictating electoral processes with them. He came to power through them, and he is in today in power because of them,”* Basha said. He added that the Netherlands has rebuked Rama’s propaganda by explaining why they refuse to open the EU accession negotiations with Albania. *“It is because of the organized crime. The EU countries have a clear image of what has been done in these six years that the country has been led by Edi Rama,”* the PD leader claimed. (www.top-channel.tv)

- June 13th, the Dutch Parliament made the Netherlands the first EU member state which officially announced it will object to the opening of accession negotiations with the EU for Albania, while approving it for North Macedonia. The Dutch Parliament blocked on Thursday the opening of EU membership negotiations with Albania this year by 70% of its Parliament. A motion submitted by MPs from the governing coalition parties was voted in the Dutch Parliament, asking the Government to vote in the European Council against the opening of negotiations with Albania. The motion received

the votes of 105 out of 150 MPs in the Parliament. This whopping over 2/3 is unexpected. According to the Government, Albania has not achieved tangible results in the fight against corruption and organized crime. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Block said that the European Commission’s recommendation to open negotiations with Albania was premature. He added that Albania has not met the criteria of the fight against corruption and organized crime. Blocking the opening of negotiations with Albania comes after the Dutch Parliament officially asked two weeks ago the Government for the EU to re-establish visas for Albanians. Prime Minister Rama despised this parliamentary request, saying it was a populist move and that the Dutch Government did not have to ask the EU for the resettlement of visas. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- June 14th, Albanian MPs loyal to Socialist Prime Minister Edi Rama adopted a resolution on Thursday declaring President Ilir Meta’s decision to cancel the local elections due on June 30th, 2019 invalid. About 100 out of 110 MPs present in the chamber on Thursday backed the resolution, which calls on public institutions to continue working in order to permit local elections to take place on June 30th, 2019 as planned. Resolution was prepared by the ruling Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë - PS). President Meta called off local elections, citing a planned opposition boycott and calling for compromise between the ruling Socialists and opposition parties. Resolution called the presidential decree is *“absolutely invalid”* and said it breached the President’s constitutional and legal competences, *“and as such, should be considered null and as if it never*

existed.” Rama has vowed to seek the dismissal of the President, and while the resolution is not part of formal procedures to dismiss him from office, the fact that it received the support of 100 MPs is seen as a test of strength. Opposition MPs relinquished their parliamentary mandates in February, claiming that Parliament was illegitimate. However, most of their places have since been filled by “rebels” from their own parties. The question is whether these “rebels” will also back a push by Rama to remove Meta from office. Under the constitution, the President can be removed if it is proved that he has “seriously breached” the Constitution. But this requires support of two-thirds of all MPs in Parliament, or 94 MPs in total. However, even if Rama obtains the support of Parliament to oust Meta, he still also needs a Constitutional Court decision to validate the procedure – and the Court is currently unable to issue any decisions because many posts on it are vacant. Opposition has refused to field candidates for local elections, leaving PS candidates with no competition in most of the 61 municipalities. A few independent candidates and small parties are running in some municipalities. Another problem is that votes must be counted by cross-party representative groups, while opposition boycott leaves the Socialists in full control of the process. Since Meta issued his decree cancelling the elections, few remaining opposition representatives in the Central Electoral Commission have refused to act, and the latest meetings had been attended only by PS representatives. Rama, meanwhile, insists the elections will go ahead and be legitimate, despite the lack of competing candidates. (www.tiranatimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political situation in Albania is “explosive” after President’s decision to postpone local elections scheduled for June 30th, 2019. Prime Minister seeks dismissal of the President, Ilir Meta. In other words, Albania is under a political and constitutional chaos. Such situation strongly affected Albania’s EU perspective. Combination of political instability, ties between politics and organized crime, and corruption made the Netherlands (and other EU member states is expected to follow the same stance) to officially reject opening of accession negotiations for Albania. Rama lost his last hopes for a positive sign which could strengthen his power; opening of EU accession negotiations could be somekind of his political prize. Under these circumstances and moving towards June 30th, 2019 when local election is scheduled to be held none could predict how situation would be escalated. Violent incidents between opposition protesters and Police forces or between ruling PS supporters and opposition ones it will not be a surprise. Rama’s Government collapse and snap elections is a possible scenario. The Government is accused of having links with organized crime and current situation raises questions over the power of “Albanian mafia” in the country and its influence in state’s politics. Undoubtedly, corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state’s problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a “mother nation.” The state maintains its leading role in the Albanian

world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. In this context, the Albanian Prime Minister and his Government work on promoting Kosovo interests in international community using any forum they have access.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

June 11th, Bosnian Presidency passed no decision on the migrant crisis, Presidency Chairman Milorad Dodik confirmed for media following an urgent session. Session was scheduled on request of Bosnia Presidency member, Zeljko Komsic, who among other things proposed the deployment of Bosnian Armed Forces to the eastern borders to prevent further influx of illegal migrants. However, Dodik rejected it. *“That is not an Army’s competency. I cannot accept the deployment of the Army on borders with Serbia and Montenegro,”* stressed Dodik, the Bosnian Serb leader who maintains strong partnership relations of Serbia and Republika Srpska (RS), Bosnia’s Serb-dominated entity that he represents. Dodik also rejected a proposal to deploy the European border and coast guard agency, FRONTEX, as according to Dodik, it would only make the border with Croatia *“harder.”* Addressing the media, Bosniak Presidency member, Sefik Dzaferovic, said he asked that the whole country shares the burden of migrant crisis equally but that his proposal is dismissed. The Presidency Chairman confirmed he is against accommodating the migrants on the territory of Bosnia’s RS entity. *“Migrant centers will not be built on the territory of Republika Srpska because Republika Srpska should not be collateral*

damage in all that,” he underlined. According to the Service of Foreigners' Affairs, over 9,000 migrants entered the country since the beginning of the year. As a part of a regular procedure, 8,466 of them expressed the intention to seek asylum but only 196 did so. Migrants were reported recently to take part in several major incidents in the northwest of Bosnia, which triggered the authorities of the Una-Sana Canton to ask for the relocation of migrant centers from urban zones for security reasons. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- June 12th, the head of the EU Delegation in Bosnia, Lars-Gunnar Wigemark, urged once again leaders to stop setting conditions for the formation of the Government following the October 2018 General Election, insisting that there is a lot for the new Government to do. He and other top EU officials have repeated several times that all sides must give up on any kind of conditions, especially when speaking about issues where there is no agreement in sight, he said. *“At this moment it is important to find a formula and begin working. So much work is waiting to be done,”* he told reporters in Mostar as he commented on the Annual National Program (ANP) being set as a condition for forming the Government. The main reason for a lack of a new Council of Ministers is a disagreement between the three Presidency members over Bosnia’s NATO path. While the Bosniak and Croat members want the country to move forward on that path, the Serb member is against it. The position of the Council of Ministers Chairman belongs to the Serbs, and their political leadership does not want to send the ANP, which is an obligation the country took up in the past. This is why the Bosniak and Croat

Presidency members refuse to greenlight the new Prime Minister. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- June 15th, instead of good neighborly relations, Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic sends out “malicious messages of hatred and intolerance,” Head of Bosnia's state Government Denis Zvizdic said responding to the Serbian official who attended a political rally in the Bosnian town of Laktasi on Saturday. Speaking at a rally of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrataor - SNSD), the major Serb party in Bosnia, Dacic said Bosnia will never be a Muslim country suggesting that this is what the Bosniaks (Muslim Bosnians) want. Zvizdic assessed it as a “chauvinist-militarist statement” intended to put the Bosniaks in a negative context. “In fact, this attempt of unscrupulous discrediting of the civilizational, moral and integrative role of the Bosniaks in preserving the integral, sovereign and multinational Bosnia and Herzegovina was incited by relapses of ultra-nationalist ideology which is based on mythomania and lies that were promoted and executed by Slobodan Milosevic,” said Zvizdic, who is at the helm of the Bosnia's state Government, formally known as the Council of Ministers. He stressed that Bosniaks never launched a political or any other movement, intention or idea that does not see Bosnia and Herzegovina as a society of equal citizens regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation. “Bosniaks never asked for a 'Muslim' Bosnia. On the contrary, Bosniaks, as well as all other citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats and each and every citizen want the integral, united, democratic and European Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a

multicultural society of equal opportunities,” he said and called on Serbia's official to stop “falsely accusing the Bosniaks.” (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Political instability and uncertainty continues in Bosnia because it has not formed a Government since October 7th, 2018 general elections. The three main parties representing the three constituent entities (Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats); HDZ (Bosnian Croatian party), SDA (Bosnian Muslim or Bosniak party), and SNSD (Bosnian Serbian party) although they have reached an agreement to cooperate in forming a Government, it seems that they still cannot overcome Bosnia's accession process towards NATO. Bosnian Serbs insist that the country should remain neutral staying out of NATO, Bosniaks remain committed to NATO accession as a precondition for supporting a Government, while Bosnian Croats appears neutral on the issue wishing to overcome the deadlock (although they are in favor of joining NATO) . Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs destabilizing the state. Of course, both entities (Croats and Serbs) take in advantage “Dayton Peace Agreement” weaknesses and malfunctions. Russia pays special attention in Serbia and Bosnia in order to maintain its influence in the region. Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, and Montenegro have already entered NATO, while North Macedonia would join the Alliance within 2019. These two

countries (Serbia and Bosnia) are the only “vehicles” for Russia to maintain a narrow influence in Southeastern Europe. Apart from external influence and intervention the country has to confront several internal “threats” which undermine its sovereignty, cohesion, and viability. EU path is too far for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU. Election of ultra nationalist pro-Russian Serb Milorad Dodik in the tripartite Presidency is a strong sign of more nationalistic rhetoric and more obstacles towards Bosnia’s EU and NATO (mostly) integration. Dodik is a person who does not actually believe in B&H viability and is expected to promote (actually, he has already started) his own political agenda.



BULGARIA: June 13th, Russia is ready to develop mutually beneficial cooperation with Bulgaria, Russian Ambassador Anatoly Makarov said on Tuesday, as cited by TASS. *“After a long break, a political dialogue has started developing again between Russia and Bulgaria, and we have been waiting for this for a long time. In the last year, Bulgarian President Rumen Radev visited Russia twice and Prime Minister Boyko Borissov once. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev in turn visited Bulgaria in March 2019. The respectful manner in which our leaders talk to each other serves as evidence that they are ready to search for ways to cooperate in the most mutually beneficial manner,”* Makarov said. The Russian Ambassador reminded that in July, Sofia and Moscow will celebrate the 140th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations. *“Results are rather good, but there is still a way to go. The main thing is that*

people who care continue working on developing cooperation,” he added. (www.novinite.com)

- June 13th, *“I spoke with my counterpart Zoran Zaev last week that if we acquire the new fighter aircraft we will protect the air space of North Macedonia as well. This will be good for them and for us,”* Bulgaria’s Premier Boyko Borissov, who attended the military exercise at the training polygon in Novo Selo said. Meanwhile, the Government Spokesperson of North Macedonia, Muammad Hoxhja commented the criticism of Bulgaria’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Ekaterina Zakarieva on the work of the Bulgaria-North Macedonia joint commission on historical and educational issues. We hope that this commission will find a solution in the spirit of friendship and good neighborliness between the two counties, Hoxhja said. (www.novinite.com)

- June 16th, Kornelia Ninova withdrew her resignation as leader of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP) at a party congress at which the leadership issue had been the main agenda item. Ninova, who submitted her resignation after the BSP’s defeat in Bulgaria’s May 2019 European Parliament elections, told the congress that she was not resigning because she wanted the party stabilized before the October municipal elections, and wanted to counter the intra-party clashes that could “liquidate” the party. Her announcement that she was not resigning was greeted with loud applause. Ahead of the June 16th, 2019 congress, a number of regional BSP organizations had called on her not to quit. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

Junior partner of the ruling coalition, United Patriots remains the vulnerable and unpredictable piece of the inter-governmental stability; none could predict when a new incident or dispute will break out. Thus, Bulgaria has entered in a period of rather stable political situation. President Radev grabs every opportunity to criticize the Government (and the Prime Minister Borissov) highlighting his different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). After European elections, opposition BSP appears weakened facing internal problems. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. However, the EC made clear that Bulgaria could not enter the Eurozone before 2022. Apart from that the European Parliament adopted a resolution for the accession of Bulgaria (and Romania) in Schengen Zone. However, it is questioned if the European Council will receive a unanimous final decision for Bulgaria under the current migration pressure. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Although modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc) military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards. The latest report on defense situation confirmed the major problems the Bulgarian Armed Forces are facing. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: June 12th, Slovenia claims that by not adhering to the arbitration

court's 2017 ruling, which heavily favored Ljubljana, Croatia is in violation of Articles 2 and 4 of the EU Fisheries Policy, regulating the transport of persons across borders and the directive on the establishment of a spatial planning framework at sea. Slovenia is unhappy with the demarcation of the border it shares with Croatia, especially the maritime border, claiming that it should have access to international waters. Interestingly, Slovenia did not make the claim until well after the border was internationally recognized, nor had the issue ever been raised when the two countries were members of the former Yugoslavia, which also observed the same borders. Croatia withdrew from the arbitration proceedings in 2015, after recordings were released clearing showing a Slovenian Foreign Ministry representative and the Slovenian member of the arbitral tribunal engaged in backroom deals in order to secure Ljubljana a favorable verdict. Concluding that the Court had been tainted beyond repair, the decision to withdraw from the arbitration was unanimously upheld by Croatian Parliament and has been maintained by every successive Government and Croatian President. Since then Croatia has called for dialogue with Slovenia on this bilateral issue. However, Slovenia has shown little interest in bilateral talks. Commenting on the latest developments on Wednesday, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic reminded that the EU Court has no jurisdiction in the bilateral dispute. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- June 13th, Interior Minister Davor Bozinovic informed the Government that the biggest pressure of irregular migrants had been lately concentrated along 350 kilometer long sections of

Croatia's border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Presenting a report on the implementation of the strategy on the integral border management in 2018, Bozinovic said that while in the previous years, a majority of migrants had come to Croatia from Serbia, currently the borderline in Karlovac, Lika and Sisak counties with northwestern Bosnia were exposed to the heaviest pressure of irregular migrants. In order to raise the resilience to this pressure, full engagement of the Border Police is necessary. In addition, 2,800 law enforcement staffers have been trained for that purpose. Furthermore, 60 Police off-road vehicles have been obtained plus 65 hand-held thermal imaging devices and 100 hand-held cameras. He said that all the entry points at the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina were designed in accordance with the Schengen rules and agreements with Bosnia and Herzegovina. A total of 19 cameras are installed along the border, 12 at the border with Serbia and seven with Bosnia and Herzegovina. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- June 13th, the Canadian company Vermilion is about to start drilling activities at the Ceric-1 site in the Vukovar - Sirmium County and it will soon start preparing a drilling well at the Berak-1 location. Initial results showing whether there is commercially producible oil and gas reserves can be known in a month's time. According to the information provided by the Croatian Hydrocarbon Agency the drilling phase ensues after two years of exploration and surveying, and the two drilling wells are parts of Vermilion's working program. On June 6th, 2019, the Croatian Government approved prolongation of periods for the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons on land by INA and Vermilion Zagreb

Exploration. In June 2016, the Government signed a contract with INA on one exploration field (Drava 2) and contracts with the Calgary-based Vermilion Exploration company on four exploration fields (Drava 4 and Sava 6, 9 and 10). Contracts envisage oil and gas exploration and exploitation in four Croatian counties. Vermilion Exploration was given an exploration permit in June 2015. Since the signing of the relevant contract in June 2016, over 17 million kuna (2.3 million euro) have been paid in fees to local communities, the Agency announced. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Good news for Croatian economy which shows dynamics and achieves upgrading by international economic organizations. At the same time the country enjoys support from EU towards its Eurozone goal. The state enjoys political stability and latest pressure from small coalition partner BM 365 is considered of minor importance. Croatia follows a tough regional policy with neighboring countries. It is openly intervene in Bosnia's internal affairs, while it maintains open disputes with Slovenia, Serbia, and Bosnia. One should take into consideration that Croatia shows its military strength and capabilities quite often not only in international, but also in national level sending strong messages to neighboring countries. Apart from that, Croatia pays special attention in energy strategy and security announcing ambitious projects. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone. It implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO

standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.



CYPRUS: June 13th, Cyprus needs to implement reforms, boost competitiveness and maintain fiscal surpluses, President of the Fiscal Council Demetris Georgiades said. External risks such as trade wars and a change to favorable monetary policy could adversely affect the Cypriot economy, he said. *“Cyprus is a small, open but indebted economy and a sharp deceleration of the world economy or a change of the European Central Bank’s monetary policy which would lead to significant increase in financing costs for households and companies and in the longer term of the sovereign, would have huge consequences,”* Georgiades told a news conference for the presentation of the council’s spring report. *“The response to these risks is reform, reform, reform.”* He highlighted the need to establish a rational mechanism that would limit the public wage bill increase to nominal GDP growth, further strengthening of the NPL framework especially as a large part of the NPLs have been assumed by the state following the sale of the Co-op Bank as well the setting up of a binding mechanism that would channel the state’s cash reserves to public debt reduction. He also highlighted the need to boost the economy’s competitiveness, an issue raised by many international organizations and surveys. *“The economy may be going well, we may have good results from tourism, real estate and other measures taken in the public and private sectors,*

but we are not in a position to swiftly respond to a new crisis,” he said. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- June 15th, the majority of opposition parties called for taking advantage of Brexit and the UN General Assembly decision asking Britain to give up control over the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean, in connection with the status of the British bases in Cyprus. The issue was discussed at the House plenum on the suggestion of Democratic Party’s (Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα - DIKO) parliamentary Spokesman Panicos Leonidou. Representatives of DIKO, Movement for Social Democracy (Κίνημα Σοσιαλδημοκρατών - EDEK), the Solidarity Movement (Κίνημα Αλληλεγγύη), and National Popular Front (Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο - ELAM) said they were in favor of utilizing Brexit and the Mauritius decision to claim the sovereign rights of the Republic. Ruling Democratic Rally (Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός - DISY) on the other hand, backs the Government’s position which is not to raise such an issue at this stage. Leonidou said that last February’s decision by of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Mauritius is an opportunity Cyprus could not miss. DIKO leader Nicolas Papadopoulos said that Brexit is of historic importance to Europe and especially Cyprus. Papadopoulos said no other Cypriot Government had in its disposal so many opportunities like the current one. *“Cyprus will be more affected than any other EU country,”* he said, adding that the Brexit’s most important side effect would concern people living within the bases while the problems would be more intense with a no-deal Brexit. He wondered why no issue was raised at least on leasing the bases area. The Solidarity Movement MP Michalis Giorgallas, said that *“now is the time to demand a new*

agreement on the bases with a termination date on their presence in Cyprus.” EDEK MP Costis Efstathiou said that the bases constitute “*an amputation of the territorial integrity of a state.*” Responding to those who believe that any claim from Britain would cause a crisis that could harm the solution of the Cyprus problem, he expressed the view that this attitude encourages London, “*which is greying the EEZ.*” “*We can and must get rid of those who created the Cyprus problem,*” Efstathiou said. Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού – AKEL) leader Andros Kyprianou said that the bases are not directly linked with Brexit since the bases have been left outside the EU. Kyprianou said his party has always argued that the bases constitute a violation of the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus but that the time to follow a similar process like that of Mauritius would come after a political decision and after assessing the situation as there are similarities but also differences. He also expressed the view that, by opening other fronts, “*we are putting the Cyprus issue at increased risk. Attention should be focused on restarting talks after the Turkish provocation in the EEZ stop,*” he said. DISY MP Demetris Demetriou said that the top priority should be harmony and continuity in what is currently being implemented with Britain within the EU. There is an agreement on reciprocity for workers and residents of the bases and citizens of the two states, he said. In the case of a Brexit agreement, he said, all problems are resolved. If there is a messy Brexit a political agreement will be necessary between the two sides, he said, adding that Britain does not want a change on what has been agreed on the bases. He also expressed the view that it is important to make a

smooth transition to the post-Brexit era, as it is important to capitalize on the developments and the decision on Mauritius, he said. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- June 15th, EUMed7 Heads of state rallying behind Cyprus to condemn Turkish actions in the island’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is out of touch with the real world and international law, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said. “*We condemn the discriminatory, unrealistic and contrary to international law statements concerning the Aegean, the eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus in the joint communiqué of the EUMed7 countries,*” the Turkish Foreign Ministry said. These statements reflect the national stance of the Greek Cypriot - Greek duo, and are inconsistent with the UN principles for a solution to the Cyprus problem, it added. The countries that signed this joint communiqué should recognize that the reason why the Cyprus problem has yet to be solved is the unwillingness of the Greek Cypriot side to share power and to acknowledge that Turkish Cypriots have equal rights, the Ministry said. Earlier in the day President Nicos Anastasiades thanked the leaders of the southern EU member states for supporting the inalienable sovereign rights of Cyprus in its EEZ and for unanimously condemning Turkish violations. He also noted Cyprus-related references contained in the Valletta Declaration, which was adopted by the leaders at the MED7 Summit. Speaking to reporters in Valetta, Anastasiades said “*It is about the violations of international law and the Treaty of Law of the Sea by the invasion, actually, of Turkey in our own Exclusive Economic Zone in an effort to drill within the area.*” So, he added, “this is a threat against peace and this is what we

are trying to avoid. “We do not want a crisis,” he stressed, adding that “the international law is there, it is quite clear so nobody could violate by using force, violate the sovereign rights of another country.” Last month Turkey issued a navigational telex (NAVTEX), announcing its intention to start drilling off Cyprus until September 3rd, 2019. Fatih drillship, accompanied by three service ships, is located almost 40 nautical miles west of the Akamas peninsula and 83 nautical miles from the Turkish coast. The area falls within the EEZ and continental shelf of Cyprus. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus has reached a deadlock in the ongoing crisis with Turkish invasion of drillship Fatih (while the second one Yavuz is sailing towards there) within its EEZ. Fatih is there more than two months, while Turkish administration declares that offshore drilling will start soon. Despite international calls to Turkey for abandoning its plans of violating the Cypriot EEZ and its sovereign rights, Turkish actions remain “unanswered.” Announcement of Cypriot administration that arrest warrants have been issued against workers in the drillship are interpreted as spasmodic actions of a trapped state which cannot act decisively and effectively for protecting its sovereignty. Actually, Cyprus is trapped because it does not have a mechanism of power (military, diplomatic, economic etc) to force Turkey to withdraw its ships. Cyprus lacks of naval and air forces which could deter Turkey of violating Cypriot sovereign rights, while Greece appears reluctant in sending naval units in the region showing presence and exercising

deterrence. Turkish message is very clear; we are present in Cyprus, we are present in the energy “game” and nothing works leaving Turkey aside. In other words, energy security includes Turkey; otherwise eastern Mediterranean is not a stable and secure sea. A “hot” incident cannot be excluded. Despite current situation, Cyprus works systematically in order to become a major part of the East Mediterranean energy hub. It is favored not only by its natural gas deposits, but also by its strategic position in the “heart” of East Mediterranean Sea and of course of being an EU member state. The strategy of multilateral cooperation seems to be fruitful. Cyprus seeks to negotiate and reach agreements with its neighboring countries regarding their EEZ expanding maritime cooperation and energy security. Turkey looks like being isolated from the energy game and its current aggressive reaction is attributed to this situation. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Cyprus improved its bilateral relations with the US, strengthened its defense cooperation with France, UK, and lately develops its defense and security relations with Germany. One could say that Cyprus strengthens defense cooperation with NATO leading countries. The US administration promotes abolishment of the arms embargo against Cyprus allowing it to improve its military capabilities. Although the UN Secretary General appears optimistic for a new round of talks between the two communities, it is assessed that talks could not be resumed with vessels violating Cypriot sovereignty. 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: June 11th, main opposition leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis called for a strong mandate in the upcoming national elections on July 7th, 2019 saying Greece needs a “*stable Government.*” “*I need and I ask for a strong mandate on July 7th,*” he told attendees at a campaign rally in the western city of Patras on Tuesday evening. “*There is no room for lost votes or experiments.*” Mitsotakis announced he will be heading New Democracy's (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) ticket in the region of Achaia, where he made the speech. Commenting on the party's economic program, he reiterated his pledge to lower the unified property tax, known as ENFIA, by 30% for all Greeks, and keep the tax-free ceiling at current levels. He vowed to push through with investments, saying he will sign the two ministerial decisions needed to unblock the stalled big investment at the old Athens airport plot at Elliniko, in southern Athens, in the first week of Government. The ND leader said his party intends to uphold labor law, proposing the establishment of what he described as a “*white register*” for employers who fulfill their obligations, adding that businesses will be encouraged to provide additional benefits to their employees. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- June 13th Eurozone creditors are concerned that Greek pension payments and social handouts and the scraping of already agreed tax reforms put the agreed primary surplus target at risk, the Head of the Eurozone bailout fund Klaus Regling said. Eurozone creditors and Athens agreed last year when Greece was exiting its last bailout that the

country would keep a primary surplus – the budget balance before debt servicing – at 3.5% of GDP until 2022. “*We are concerned that the fiscal measures adopted last month put the fiscal target of the primary surplus of 3.5% of GDP at risk,*” Regling told a news conference, adding he took note of the Greek Government’s statement it would reach the primary surplus target despite these measures. Greek lawmakers approved in May tax breaks and bonuses for pensioners before elections in early July, rowing back some austerity mandated by international bailouts. The package brought by the left-wing Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) administration includes an annual payment for 2.5 million pensioners, a reduction in a sales tax on basic foodstuffs and a cut in tax rates on electricity and gas bills. “*Of course we are now in June, there is another six months to go, so we are talking about estimates here, but we are quite confident together with the Commission that this risk is really there, that the primary surplus might be missed by a significant margin,*” Regling said. “*We are also concerned because the commitment to consult with the institutions on important fiscal measures was not adhered to ... which is clearly a breach of the agreed process,*” Regling said. “*So we will come back to all these things with the new Government,*” he said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- June 16th, an extraordinary session of the Governmental Council for External Affairs and Defense (Κυβερνητικό Συμβούλιο Εξωτερικών και Άμυνας – KYSEA) was held under the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras Chairmanship. During the session it was analyzed and assessed Turkish aggression and provocativeness in Eastern

Mediterranean, Cyprus, and Aegean. Tsipras had a telephone talk with Cypriot Nicos Anastasiades in order to coordinate Greece – Cyprus common reactions in the context of the EU where both states are members. It was decided that Foreign Minister Giorgos Katrougalos should inform his counterparts during the EU External Affairs Council in Brussels. After KYSEA session, Tsipras sent a clear message to Ankara saying that anyone who violates Greece and Cyprus, both EU member states, sovereign rights will face consequences. (www.kathimerini.gr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Snap parliamentary elections announced for July 7th, 2019 after ruling SYRIZA was strongly defeated in the European and local elections by opposition conservatives ND. The country has entered into a long pre-electoral period due to European and local election and the coming parliamentary one. ND will focus to achieve a full majority in the coming elections in order to form a stable Government. On the other hand it is a period that Greece faces diplomatic and security challenges mainly by Turkey. Internal terrorism is considered as a major unresolved problem of national security undermining stability of the state. Greek – Turkish relations are in critical point due to Turkey's decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills. Moreover, Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial and maritime sovereign rights. Extraordinary convocation of KYSEA is a sign that Greece is afraid of further escalation by Turkey. A crisis to Cyprus means a crisis to Greece forcing Armed Forces to deploy military,

naval, and air units. Taking into consideration that Cyprus lacks of naval and air power it is Greece which will support the small and vulnerable island located in the East Mediterranean heart. Turkish fighter jets intensified their activity regarding violation of Greek airspace and issue of NAVTEXs within Greek territorial waters for military exercises (including fires). Strengthening of military cooperation between Greece and the U.S upgrades Greece's strategic role in Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East as a western (US, EU, NATO) forward military base. On the other hand, Greece is concerned that this upgraded relation with the US may reinforce Turkish aggression in the Aegean Sea. Furthermore, Greece seeks to modernize its Armed Forces by receiving US military aid. It is a fact that Greek military force has been affected by the long economic crisis threatening the balance of power with Turkey. Security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ.



KOSOVO: June 11th, Behgjet Pacolli, Kosovo's Foreign Minister, said Pristina broke up communication with UNMIK accusing the UN mission to Pristina of violating international law and the UN Charter, the FoNet news agency reported. Recess will last “until UNMIK clarifies situation,” Pacolli added. He reacted to the report of Zahir Tain, the UN Secretary-General Special Envoy to Kosovo and UNMIK Chief, which submitted to UN Security Council on Monday, saying it was “completely unacceptable.” Pacolli said Kosovo's authorities acted as a state when

the Special Police Unit arrested and beaten two UNMIK staff personnel on May 28th, 2019 during the operation in the north targeting organized crime and corruption. Tanin said the authorities did not respect the immunity of the UN staff, and that UNMIK launched an internal investigation into the incident. *“UNMIK members violated international law and the UN Charter. One of them obstructed the Police job, while the other was caught stealing. UNMIK should deal with that, not with Kosovo. We broke up any communication with UNMIK and until they make situation clear we will not consider them as friends. The image of UNMIK in Kosovo today is regrettable,”* Pacolli wrote on social media. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 14th, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci said that a maximum of coordination between the EU and US could bring about a final agreement between Belgrade and Pristina. Speaking at an award ceremony in Tirana, Thaci said that the history of Kosovo is a *“story of full local and international success”* because it was recognized by 160 countries and became a member of some 200 international organizations. The awards were presented to citizens of Albania who contributed to Kosovo’s independence. *“Kosovo as a state has its partners and followers, its friends as well as opponents on the Euro-Atlantic path. The one thing that is certain is that Kosovo has a future in NATO and the EU. It is moving slowly but surely,”* Thaci said. Thaci said that the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue should be unconditional *“with equal conditions for two independent and sovereign countries.”* (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 14th, the EU Office in Kosovo issued a press release confirming that Kosovo and EU held

the 3rd Stabilization and Association Agreement Sub-Committee on Justice, Freedom and Security. During the two-day meeting, officials exchanged views on various areas related to rule of law, human rights and home affairs. In all areas, the EU and Kosovo agreed on the importance of implementing the priorities included in the European Reform Agenda and the recommendations from the Commission’s 2019 Kosovo Report. Both parties also discussed the need for transitional justice, dealing with the past and clarifying the whereabouts of missing people from the conflict. Kosovo authorities updated the EU on their reform efforts, including the *“Justice 2020”* initiative and the *“Functional Review of the Rule of Law Sector.”* Both sides also discussed the further roll-out of the electronic case management system and the centralized criminal record registry. Regarding anti-corruption, a number of legislative developments were discussed. The EU welcomed the adoption of the new Criminal Code. Both sides agreed that a full implementation of all new rules of law-related legislation will be crucial. The EU called on Kosovo authorities to continue work on and approve the revised Criminal Procedure Code as well as further anti-corruption related legislation. The EU stressed that the draft law on political party financing needs to be in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission. In the area of home affairs and the fight against organized crime, views were exchanged on migration, asylum and readmission, police reform, the fight against narcotics and terrorism, and the prevention of radicalization. Both sides agreed full implementation of all strategies in these areas is crucial. The EU commended progress in the areas of migration, asylum and the

fight against terrorism. The parties discussed the importance of international police cooperation. Kosovo authorities underlined the importance of signing the working arrangements with Europol. The parties further discussed the need to strengthen efforts and capacities to tackling crime, in particular cybercrime, drugs and organized crime, including through increased number of final confiscations. Aspects related to visa liberalization were also discussed. The Commission confirmed its assessment of July 2018, stating that Kosovo has fulfilled all visa liberalization benchmarks. In March 2019, the European Parliament supported the Commission's proposal for visa liberalization in its first reading. The proposal is pending in the Council. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo keeps escalating tension with Serbia blocking any chance of dialogue restart. Latest Police operation in the north arresting Serbs (and Albanians), 100% tax on Serbian and Bosnian products, Kosovo Assembly resolution that Serbs committed genocide during 1998-1999 war, establishment of Kosovo Army, request for a special Court for Serbs are just a few actions which undermine any possibility of negotiations with Serbia. By keep repeating in every forum that there is nothing else to talk than "Serbia recognizing Kosovo" you simply do not promote dialogue. Pristina does not hesitate to escalate tension even with an armed conflict. Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci stated that his state could be unified with Albania including parts of south Serbia (Presevo, Bujanovac and Medveja). Such statements are not only immature, but also

put under risk peace and stability in the region. Thaci openly speaks for border change and more specific violent change. It is strongly recommended that international community, namely the UN, EU and US should terminate decisively such irresponsible ideas. Under these circumstances it is rather difficult to see tangible results in next meeting scheduled for July 2019 in Paris (If the meeting happens eventually). Furthermore, Kosovo Foreign Ministry announced communication with UNMIK has halted adding another "interesting" chapter in the state's current situation. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. Kosovo seeks its Army to be operating all over the country pushing NATO towards such direction. The presence of Kosovo Army in the north it is assessed of high security risk which may lead in armed violence. One should take into consideration that the Serb President has already ordered all defense and security stakeholders to take all necessary measures for protecting Serbian population in Kosovo.



MOLDOVA: June 11th, the outgoing Government of Pavel Filip has decided on June 11th, 2019 the transfer of the headquarters of the Embassy of Moldova in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the Government's communication and protocol department has

reported. Also, the Cabinet has decided to approve the signing of the Agreement on the sale of land for construction of the US Embassy in Moldova. *“We were in a position to approve urgently these projects in view of the political instability and uncertainty in the country, as well as the recent political developments by which one of the parties that have tried to block these two projects attempts permanently to take the power illegally. There are two commitments we had made before, and we want to be sure that they are respected, no matter what happens after early elections,”* Filip said. These projects are commitments undertaken by the Government of Moldova, and they were not wished to be blocked in the long run due to political crisis in Moldova. (www.moldpres.md)

- June 14th, Prime Minister in office, Pavel Filip, has announced resignation of the Cabinet of Ministers. Decision has been made public after the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM) announced that it had decided to withdraw from governance. *“We have decided to present our resignation from the positions we are still exercising under the law. We made this decision first because it is being put an enormous pressure on civil servants, teachers, police, doctors, and military in recent days. There are people who do their job and obey the country and the law, not politicians. We shall not be the reason why these people are in the horrible situation of choosing a camp or another,”* the outgoing Prime Minister said. *“Our leaving will not solve the current legal blockage, nor invalidate decisions of the Constitutional Court (CC). The constitutional crisis remains without solutions,”* Filip stressed. (www.moldpres.md)

- June 16th, Prime Minister Maia Sandu expressed its annoyance on Constitutional Court's announcement that the reason for the rejection of all decisions taken on June 7th – 9th, 2019 is *“situation in the Republic of Moldova, especially the announcement of the transfer of power to the Government of Sandu and the coalition formed in the Parliament of Moldova.”* It should be noted that three out of six Magistrates of the Constitutional Court come from the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM). *“Judges of Constitutional Court continue their delirium, nationally and internationally shaming the institution they represent. In essence, the Court, rather than recognizing that it participated in the desperate attempt of the Democratic Party to maintain its power unlawfully, justifies its decision only by the fact that this is the situation at present in the Republic of Moldova. I call this approach inappropriate from the perspective of respect for the Supreme State Law. The Constitutional Court must adopt acts in accordance with the provisions of the letter and spirit of the Constitution, and not based on the decisions and behavior of political actors in the country. At the same time, I ask the judges of the Court to submit their resignations immediately if they still have a little honor and respect for the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova and the citizens of this country,”* Sandu said. Previously, the Constitutional Court ruled by PDM leader Vladimir Plahotniuc, declared election of the Moldovan Parliament's leadership and the confidence vote of the new Government as unconstitutional, after having previously decided that the deadline for a new Government to be established was June 7th, 2019 and not June

9th, 2019 as it had been announced initially. (www.moldova.org)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Moldova faces rapid political developments following visits of US, EU, and Russian top officials. Pro-Russian PSRM and pro-western ACUM bloc reached an agreement to establish a majority Government. It seems that the country has avoided turbulence and political chaos after PDM Government announced its resignation. New Prime Minister Maia Sandu has started its effort to control state institutions seeking to establish her governance rule. Constitutional Court controlled by PDM has played a “dirty” role in blocking new parliamentary majority to take office smoothly jeopardizing state’s peace and stability. Sandu has already asked for Magistrates resignation. Although it seems that new Government will take office normally, escalation of tension and violent clashes cannot be ruled out. Needless to say that the country has come in the edge of civil turbulence. It is interesting to watch the new international orientation of the country since a pro-Russian and pro-western party formed the Government. It looks like a compromise enjoying the green light of Russia and US. Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. Political instability and uncertainty affect vitally in state’s function blocking reforms, harming economy and keeping the country far from European standards. The EU tough policy against Moldova may soften now as a signal of support to the new Government which includes a pro-western party. Such support could be expressed by restarting micro-economic

assistance. The ongoing crisis between Russia and Ukraine may affect Moldova; First of all Russia maintains military forces in Transnistrian ground and secondly it shares common borders with Ukraine which cannot be unnoticed by international stakeholders. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: June 12th, the Ministry of Defense announced that it will recruit 80 soldiers for one year contract with the possibility of extension to three years. “Candidates who fulfill the required qualifications will join physical and health tests, and an interview organized by the Ministry of Defense will,” the statement said. Recruited soldiers will be assigned in Land (18 soldiers), Navy (10 soldiers), and Air (5 soldiers) Force. Furthermore, 42 people will be assigned in the Support Battalion and three in the Electronic Warfare unit. (www.vijesti.me)

- June 13th, the Government of Montenegro said that nobody in Montenegro seeks to create legislative framework for any foreign state and, therefore, it would not allow anybody to interfere in Montenegro’s legal system. Representatives of the Montenegrin Government thanked Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic for his advice adding that Montenegro receives its own decisions. Earlier, Vucic invited the authorities of Montenegro to reject the Proposal Law on Freedom of Religion. “We would like to remind Mr Vucic that Montenegro is a sovereign state which creates its own legislative framework taking into consideration the interests of every individual and the entire community. We do not

want to meddle into the legislative activities of Serbia and, therefore, we will not allow any state to influence our decisions,” reads the response provided by the Public Relations Service. (www.cdm.me)

- June 15th, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian affairs at the US State Department, Matthew Palmer, accused Russia of standing behind a coup attempt in Montenegro in October 2016 and of trying to “mince” the deal between Skopje and Athens, which opened Euro-Atlantic perspective of North Macedonia. He also said that US sanctions against the BiH President Milorad Dodik will be strengthened until he changes his stance and attitude. Palmer pointed out that Washington's goal is BiH and other Balkan countries to become members of the EU and NATO, while Russia seeks to block this process. Palmer pointed out that the US and Russia have different goals in Southeast Europe. *“The cornerstone of US policy for Western Balkans is to support Euro-Atlantic integration, which means EU and NATO membership for all countries,”* he recalled. *“Russians have a much different goal in the Balkans; they want to see a region that is divided and where there is a high degree of tension and division,”* the US diplomat said. (www.vijesti.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although EC Progress Report is assessed as a positive one, it raises specific concerns over media freedom, corruption and organized crime. Report is elaborating on specific cases signaling detailed research. Montenegro enters in a crucial crossroad regarding its EU future and specific

reforms and actions should be implemented if it remains committed in its goal to access the EU in 2025. Political stability is re-establishing again after DF decision to return in parliamentary Committees. Protests against the President and high officials disturbed a period of “euphoria”, emerging state’s problems such as corruption, link between state’s politics and organized crime, money laundering, media freedom, and nepotism. However, protesters movement has lost dynamics and ruling DPS is more stable. The EP has already stated that Montenegro under certain conditions may be able to access the EU by 2025. It is assessed that the EU and U.S strongly supports the President Djukanovic and the Montenegrin Government despite corruption accusations as being the only loyal partner committed to the Western orientation of the state. In other words the west is closing its eyes in lack of democratic values and rule of law due to geopolitical interests namely Russian influence. The Government promotes state’s political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment; It is estimated that the state needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Montenegro shows activity within NATO trying to prove that it is an equal partner of the alliance with military capacity according to NATO standards. Moreover, it tries to modernize and strengthen its operational capabilities and in this context it raised its defense budget aiming at purchasing new assets such as armored vehicles.



NORTH MACEDONIA: June

10th, a debate for the registration of the population is taking place in North Macedonia. This process, which is expected to be carried out in April 2020, has a cost of 8.5 million euro. In order for this process to be wrapped up, Parliament must adopt the bill on census, which has been drafted by the Ministry of Justice. Debates in Parliamentary Committees are expected to kick off today (Monday). The largest opposition party, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE), is threatening to boycott this process. *“The Government is attempting to vote this bill without holding consultations. Fast-tracking the voting of the bill makes us suspicious of the real motives that Prime Minister Zoran Zaev has,”* said Naum Stoilkovski, VMRO-DPMNE’s Spokesperson. State Office for Statistics said that there will be no room for abuses and that this process will comply with the law. This will be the ninth census that North Macedonia holds since declaring independence from the former Yugoslav federation. The latest census was carried out in 2002, while in 2011 it failed five days before the process was finalized due to disagreements with regards to registration of the population that temporarily lives abroad. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- June 11th, by the end of this week, Prime Minister of North Macedonia, Zoran Zaev will decide whether to reshuffle the governing cabinet or announce early elections. This will all depend on the meeting that Zaev will hold with German

Chancellor Angela Merkel where he will be informed on the position of the German Government regarding the date of the opening of accession talks. *“If no date for the accession negotiations is given this summer, then all options are open, including early general elections,”* Zaev warned. Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, Bujar Osmani has also signaled important developments. *“In Thursday, along with Prime Minister Zaev we will be meeting chancellor Merkel in Berlin where we will learn what will happen in July and October,”* Osmani said. On the other hand, opposition says that a caretaker Government must be formed in order to hold fresh elections. Leader of Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE), Hristijan Mickoski said that his party will win next elections. *“I am convinced that we will win next elections. We will form a new Government and Macedonia’s [North Macedonia] EU integration will then be a sure thing,”* Mickoski declared in a televised interview. Albanian opposition also said that it is ready to head to early elections following the numerous failures of the current Government with regards to reforms. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- June 13th, German Chancellor Angela Merkel met North Macedonia’s Prime Minister Zoran Zaev in Berlin informing him that the Parliament (Bundestag) will decide the approval of North Macedonia’s accession talks with the EU in September 2019. *“The Chancellor underlined that North Macedonia has delivered on its*

expectations and that Berlin has a very positive outlook,” the North Macedonia Government said following the meeting. Zaev, said his country “has full faith in Chancellor Merkel and supports its policy on the EU enlargement process, as well as her policy towards the Western Balkans.” “There is a strong conviction that we are starting EU accession talks this year,” the Government in Skopje said. The short press statement from the German Government made no firm commitments. It noted only that the two sides had focused on bilateral relations, as well as on “foreign and European policy issues,” reiterating Berlin’s praise for last year’s historic agreement between Athens and Skopje on the latter’s name. Zaev’s visit to Berlin comes after the Bundestag last week failed to take any decision on supporting a start date for accession talks with either North Macedonia or Albania, dealing blow to both countries’ aspirations. This means that a debate on when to open accession talks with the two countries cannot be on the agenda of the European Council later this month. The issue will now have to be postponed to autumn at the earliest. (www.balkaninsight.com)



Chancellor Angela Merkel greets Prime Minister Zoran Zaev at the Federal Chancellery
(Photo source: www.bundestkanzlerin.de)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and his ruling coalition are disappointed from the EU and especially from Germany regarding opening of accession talks. It seems that decision on this matter is moving in September 2019 at the earliest. Zaev’s visit in Germany was the last desperate effort to change Germany’s stance but he received a clean answer by Merkel. Such delays create serious internal problems for ruling coalition and snap election is on the table. Zaev based his political survival and dominance in the triptych “resolution of name issue with Greece – NATO accession – opening of EU accession talks.” Although the first one was successfully accomplished and the second is proceeding rapidly the third one has stuck. With VMRO-DPMNE pushing for caretaker Government and snap elections, it seems that Zaev is running out of arguments. Definitely, North Macedonia and Albania are two different cases regarding their EU future and should not be handled as a single package. The threats of nationalism and political instability are covering North Macedonia’s sky. The country should focus on its economy and major administrative and judicial reforms, fight against corruption and impunity aiming at reaching the EU standards.



ROMANIA: June 13th, Romania’s President Klaus Iohannis, in an official letter on June 12th, 2019 asked Heads of the European Council and the European Commission to urgently identify together with the EU member states concrete actions to put an end to the current constitutional and political crisis in Moldova, local Hotnews.ro reported. He called for a negotiated solution, based on the values and

principles of the EU. Romania, as a member state of the EU, having a special relationship with Moldova, and sharing a common language, history, and culture, is concerned with the developments in Chisinau, President Iohannis stated. He invoked Moldova being an associate partner of the EU and a member of the Eastern Partnership. One day before, Romania's Foreign Affairs Ministry stated support for the democratically elected Parliament and the new Government in Chisinau. At this moment, a constitutional crisis takes place in Moldova, with the outgoing Government controlled by controversial local businessman Vlad Plahotniuc, supported by the Constitutional Court, refusing to hand over the power to the new Government formed by a coalition of pro-EU and pro-Russian parties. The Venice Commission said that it would issue an opinion on the developments in Moldova on June 21st, 2019. (www.romania-insider.com)

- June 13th, Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) convened again to discuss preparations for the announced extraordinary Congress on June 29th, 2019 that will elect a new party leadership. 3,000-4,000 members are expected to attend. Prime Minister Viorica Dancila announced that she would run for the position of Chairman of the Party. *"Yes, I am determined to run for the Chairmanship. I can bring a balance at present. I can unite PSD organizations and we can boost mobilization for the presidential election. It is important what we can do in the coming period so that PSD could win the elections,"* Dancila said. At the same time, senator Serban Nicolae has announced his intention to run for Presidency, as

sources within the party disclosed. Serban Nicolae is known for his arguable actions to amend the justice laws to decriminalize graft deeds and for controversial statements defending the politicians who had pending corruption files or legal problems. According to the PSD Secretary General Rodica Nassar, the party will amend the article stipulating that the President is elected by the votes of the majority of the members, and the same goes for the presidential candidate. *"A representation rate will be set for every organization,"* Nassar explained. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- June 14th, the non-confidence motion filed by Romania's opposition parties against the Government was read on June 12th, 2019 less than two hours after it was filed with Parliament, in the plenary session of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. It was scheduled to be debated and voted on Tuesday, June 18th, 2019 G4media.ro reported. The motion was filed by Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR), National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL), People's Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP) and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR), while PRO Romania (PRO România - PRO) promised to support it as well. USR Head Dan Barna said that 173 MPs signed the motion (not counting the votes from Pro Romania) and it needs 233 votes to pass. Raluca Turcan from PNL (counting Pro Romania votes) estimated that the motion still needs the support of some 20-30 MPs. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling PSD is prepared for the extraordinary party congress where new leadership will be elected. Prime Minister Viorica Dancila seeks to be elected as the new party Chairman succeeding Liviu Dragnea who was sentenced in 3 ½ years in prison for corruption. Opposition has filed a motion of no confidence against the Government which will be discussed in the parliament on June 18th, 2019. Citizens expressed their dissatisfaction against the Government with their vote in European election. The President strongly opposes against Government's plans to intervene in judicial system and it still remains to see if the Government changes its policy regarding this sensitive issue after Dragnea's imprisonment. Romania is running the Presidency of the Council of EU facing criticism and non-confidence by the EU member states' high officials. The state looks divided in major institutional issues such as national defense, justice, and security. In this context, one should add the direct European Commission's warning for imposing a new control mechanism over state's judicial system and reforms (Rule of Law Framework) in order to avoid activating article 7 of the EU Treaty (suspending certain rights of an EU member state when a country is considered at risk of breaching the EU's core values). The state faces political abnormality in many levels which at the moment could be resolved only by early parliamentary elections. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning has become an advanced base close to Russia. Its strategic importance and role has been upgraded and high level NATO exercises take place in its territory. Consequently, Russia reacts mainly against the NATO military base in Deveselu where anti-missile defense systems have been deployed.

Temporarily deployment of THAAD system, a modern high-capability system, may raise tension in the region.



SERBIA: - June 13th, President Aleksandar Vucic warned that Serbia will face “an even worse situation” if the July 1st, 2019 summit in Paris is cancelled. “If there is no Paris we will be in an even worse situation than we are today. Both us and the entire region,” Vucic told reporters, adding that Serbia is always ready for a constructive dialogue but is not going to give up its principles. “It takes at least two to talk,” Vucic said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 15th, multinational tactical exercise “Slavic brotherhood 2019” commenced on Saturday with the soldiers' line up in the town of Pancevo, east of Belgrade, the Defense Ministry announced. The exercise has gathered the Armed Forces from Serbia, Russia and Belarus at Pancevo's “Rastko Nemanjic” barracks, where the soldiers will take part in an anti-terrorist operation. More than 750 soldiers are participating in the exercise, which will be held at “Kovin” airport and military complexes “Oresac” and “Peskovi.” (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 16th, European Commission's report on Serbia's progress towards the EU is not so negative in the part referring to the Parliament of Serbia although there is room for improvement, Parliament Speaker Maja Gojkovic told Belgrade media adding that she is open for talks with opposition. “I have already presented some measures (to improve the work) and I was urging even before the report, and I will continue calling on the political groups' Chiefs to reach the best

possible solutions for everyone through dialogue,” Gojkovic told daily newspaper Politika. She assessed that the essence of the problem is not in parliamentary procedures but in attempts of those who did not take part in elections to take over the rule. *“Those who do not have legitimate representatives in the Parliament are the strongest opponents of the dialogue in the Parliament, although this is the only place for that, like European officials said,”* the Parliament Speaker said. Speaking of changes to the Parliament’s Rules of Procedure, Gojkovic said that as long as she is the Parliament Speaker the new rules of procedure will be adopted only in consensus, not in having someone outvoted. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country has entered in a period of fragile political stability due to citizens’ reactions against governmental practices regarding human rights, media freedom, and elections transparency. Although protesters insist on organizing protests, it seems that opposition reactions lose momentum. President Alexandar Vucic announced that elections (parliamentary and local) will be held on March or April 2020. Opposition said that if its requests will not be fulfilled, elections will be boycotted. It is assessed that Vucic feels more confident that fully controls political situation in Serbia and there is no need for early elections at the moment. Regarding Belgrade – Pristina dialogue there is nothing to be expected in the near future; the whole process has reached a deadlock. Taking into consideration that both sides harden their rhetoric one should not expect any progress in the

new meeting in Paris scheduled for July 2019. Kosovo Police Special Forces “ROSU” in Serbian north Kosovo was an expected operation, but escalated tension with Serbia. Armed Forces were put in full alert but without any deployment of units across Serbia – Kosovo border. Serbia strengthens its relations with Russia (and China) seeking stronger support regarding Kosovo case. Security situation is complex and uncertain especially after Police or military operations in North Kosovo (with Serbian majority population) which endangers the possibility of armed violence. None could predict Serbia’s reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation including) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. At the moment, Serbia looks like acting in accordance with the international law aiming at reducing tension in the region. In other words state’s leadership is acting in a “reasonable” and “wise” way avoiding mistakes of the past which have isolated Serbia from the international community. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its armed forces declaring towards all sides that its Armed Forces are the power of the state.



SLOVENIA: June 12th, the EU Court of Justice has scheduled for July 8th, 2019 an oral hearing in the case that Slovenia has brought against Croatia due to its failure to implement the award of the border arbitration tribunal. Slovenia has accused Croatia of breaching several provisions of EU treaties and regulations with its refusal to implement the final award of an

arbitration tribunal the two countries appointed to resolve their long-standing border dispute. In general, Slovenia asserts Croatia is failing to respect rule of law which is a fundamental value of the EU and unilaterally refuses to fulfill its obligations under the arbitration award which is in breach of its duty of sincere cooperation as enshrined in the EU treaty. Slovenia has also made more specific charges relating to breach of common fisheries policy, violation of the rules governing the free movement of people and violations preventing Slovenia from conducting maritime spatial planning. Court will first determine whether the application is admissible. The Foreign Ministry said that Slovenian side would “reiterate its position that the final award of arbitration tribunal on the border is valid and binding. By rejecting the border as determined with the arbitration award, Croatia is preventing Slovenia from exercising EU law in certain parts of Slovenian territory. This is why Slovenia is suing Croatia at the EU Court.” According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miro Cerar Slovenia is well prepared for the July 8th, 2019 hearing. He stressed that the arbitration award would remain binding no matter what the Luxemburg Court decides and would have to be implemented. Croatia insists that the Court is not competent to rule in this case. Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said that Croatia supports the idea that all disputes should be resolved bilaterally. (www.sta.si)

- June 13th, the Government adopted a decree updating Slovenia's list of safe countries from 2016. The list has three new names, while Turkey has been removed from it. This means that Slovenia will no longer return migrants or

extradite suspects to Turkey. The new list contains 14 countries; Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, Kosovo, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tunisia, and newcomers Georgia, Nepal and Senegal. A third country, meaning a non EU member state, is considered safe if it can be assumed, based on several factors, that in general it does not see persecution, torture, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment and people are not in danger due to an international or internal conflict. There was a push last year to remove Turkey from the list after Slovenia rejected asylum applications of 38 Turks even though they had left Turkey for fear of persecution. However, their motion was rejected by the previous Parliamentary Committee. (www.sta.si)

- June 14th, party leaders appear to have reached a tentative agreement on electoral system reform, with the majority in favor of a solution that would bring the electoral system for general elections much closer to how members of the European Parliament are elected. The majority of parties are in favor of abolishing electoral districts leaving only electoral units in which MPs would be elected with relative preferential votes, the President's office said after President Borut Pahor hosted the third round of consultations with parliamentary parties. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability. Although the Government is a minority one seeking compromise for survival, Sarec has been proved of being flexible in Slovenia's politics so far achieving to balance adequately between

different political trends. Left party (Levica) is the key factor for Government's stability and viability by supporting it in the Parliament. Without the Left's support the Government would be toppled and early elections should be called. At the moment none of the ruling coalition parties wish snap elections. The Prime Minister Marjan Sarec looking in the future and next parliamentary elections seeks to unify political forces belong to the ALDE family against SDS which keeps on being the most powerful political force in the country. Agreement between parliamentary parties on electoral reform is another positive step towards political stability. The Government has to address several internal social issues (increase of minimum wage, health care, pensions etc). Announcement that 2020 and 2021 state budget will be focused on healthcare and pensions shows that current Government seeks to strengthen social care structures of Slovenia. Border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia remains active with low scale skirmishes not excluded periodically. Slovenia implies that the ongoing border dispute may affect its decision regarding Croatia's membership candidacy in Schengen Zone. Announcement of the EU Court that Slovenia's complaint against Croatia will be heard on July 8th, 2019 will add another chapter on the two countries dispute. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed military force to support Police tasks. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited

operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end.



TURKEY: June 14th, Conscription is a hot topic nowadays in Turkey as thousands of conscripts await discharge if Parliament accepts a new system that will shorten the compulsory service. The new model which will further reduce service for conscripts will also bring in revenue of about 5.1 billion Turkish Lira (770 million euro approximately) for the Turkish Armed Forces. The military calculated that revenues would surpass costs with the new model, expected to cost some 3.1 billion Turkish Lira (468 million euro approximately). Those revenues include payments by would-be conscripts for paid military service and “conscription with foreign currency” where Turks living abroad can pay cash to be exempted from long-term conscription. Some 145,000 people are expected to pay for paid exemption and that means 4.4 billion Turkish Lira (664 million euro approximately). Similarly, an expected 20,000 people will pay a total of 620 million Turkish Lira (93.5 million euro approximately) for exemption through foreign currency. Currently, the Army employs 657,000 military personnel and seeks to include more professional, career officers in its ranks instead of conscripts. According to the latest figures, the army employs 23,789 military officers, 62,174 noncommissioned officers and 73,966 specialist sergeants and corporals. The rest are “contract” officers or civilians without military academy training who are recruited upon application as

entry-level officers. More than 229,000 people serve as conscripts currently. Another 200,000 military personnel are employed as gendarmerie officers. In other words, almost half of the army is composed of professional, career officers instead of conscripts, who were once the majority in the Turkish Armed Forces. Authorities expect a further increase in the number of contract officers and other professionals by next year with new applications. Ismet Yılmaz, the lawmaker who heads Parliament's National Defense Committee, said that about 66,000 people would prefer staying in conscription after their mandatory service ends. Under a draft bill, mandatory service for every young Turkish man will be reduced to six months from 12 months and those who want to serve six months more will be paid about 2,000 Turkish Lira (300 euro approximately) per month. The new system also brings permanent, paid military service for those who can afford it. For paid exemption, conscripts will be required to undergo one-month military training, and they will be exempted from the rest of the five months of service by paying 30,000 Turkish Lira (4.5 euro approximately). If the new law is approved, 106,000 conscripts will be discharged earlier than they were scheduled but officials dismiss concerns that there will be “a shortage of soldiers” in the army which is engaged in counterterrorism operations amid multiple threats from the terrorist groups. Yılmaz said their calculations show there would be a gradual increase in the number of personnel with new recruits within a few months though there would be an initial decline in the number of troops. Yılmaz claimed that the new system would allow the Turkish Armed Forces to be more efficient in recruiting specialized personnel. In a social media

message yesterday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said they need the new conscription system as modern times made the military profession a vocation necessitating a very good training and specialty. Military service is viewed as a patriotic duty by the majority of Turkish citizens, but it also poses a dilemma for the army which has to provide professional training to thousands of inexperienced conscripts in a short time. The country already decreased the number of conscripts, especially in risky areas where counterterrorism operations against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) terrorist group are being conducted in southeastern and eastern Turkey. It also started hiring contract officers to aid career officers in risky operations and for the defense of national borders. Erdogan said Turkey has long been preparing to switch to a professional army in a planned way and noted that there was an obvious backlog of youth of conscription age. (www.dailysabah.com)

- June 14th, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned the Assad regime not to provoke Turkey through attacks targeting Turkish observation points established in the de-escalation area in northwestern Syria's Idlib province. “*If the regime attacks more Turkish observation points and continues to take such missteps, we cannot remain silent. We want deaths to stop in Syria, the bombing of Idlib with barrel and phosphorous bombs is inexcusable,*” Erdogan told reporters in Istanbul before departing for Tajikistan to attend the Fifth Summit of Heads of State of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). The President said Turkey is listening to the voice of the Syrian people in the region, who are asking Ankara to

intervene against the bloodshed. Erdogan also said Turkey will continue working toward eradicating the presence of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) offshoot the People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria. *"Our strategic partner the US has not kept its word regarding Manbij and our expectations were not realized,"* he said, referring to a deal agreed between Ankara and Washington in June 2018 that envisaged the withdrawal of the YPG from northern Syrian district it occupied in August 2016, as well as joint patrols by the militaries of both countries and the safe return of locals. He added that the US' failure to implement the Manbij deal does not mean that Turkey has abandoned these areas, and its works on Manbij and YPG-held areas east of the Euphrates River are being carried out meticulously. Syria is expected to be on the agenda of the CICA summit in Dushanbe, and leaders including Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping will also attend the forum. (www.dailysabah.com)

- June 16th, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he expects Russian S-400 missile defense systems to start arriving in Turkey in the first half of July, a development set to fuel tensions with NATO ally Washington. The S-400s are not compatible with NATO's systems and have been a growing source of discord between Turkey and the US in recent months. *"We discussed the S-400 subject with Russia. Indeed the S-400 issue is settled,"* Erdogan was cited as telling reporters on his plane returning from a visit to Tajikistan, where he attended a summit and met Russian President Vladimir Putin. *"I think they will start to come in the first half of July,"* he added, giving a more specific

forecast than he has in the past. US acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan this month outlined how Turkey would be pulled out of the F-35 fighter jet program unless Ankara changed course from its plans to buy the missile systems. Erdogan said he would discuss the issue with the US President Donald Trump when they meet at this month's G-20 summit. On Thursday, Erdogan vowed to seek answers on his country's *"exclusion from F-35 project for reasons that have no rational or legitimate basis,"* adding that Turkey is not only a customer but also a program partner of the F-35 project. Speaking at a meeting of his Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi – AKP) members, Erdogan said *"We will call to account in every platform Turkey being excluded from the F-35 program for reasons without rationale or legitimacy. We have so far paid 1.250 billion dollars."* (www.aljazeera.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Turkish – US relations keep on deteriorating especially after acting US Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan's letter to Turkish authorities notifying that F-35 pilots training is terminating by July 31st, 2019 and Turkey is suspended from the fighter jet project. With Russia announcing that S-400 deliveries will start in two months (President Erdogan announced that deliveries will start mid-July), more sanctions against Turkey are expected. However, taking into consideration that Turkey is a pivotal country enjoying geopolitical importance and having one of the largest militaries (the 2nd within NATO) it is hard to assess that the US seek a full rift with its NATO ally. On the contrary, there are still open

official and unofficial channels of communication working on a mutual accepted compromise. The US needs Turkey and the opposite, especially in a period where Middle East is in turbulence. Economic recession does not help the Turkish President to strengthen his position internally undermining his political power. Turkey is heading in a major economic crisis. It seems that economy is the major Turkish problem which may be emerged as the “Achilles’ heel” for Erdogan and his political long reign. Revote of municipal elections in Istanbul raises questions for the whole process and transparency of procedure. Free and fair elections are under question in Turkey taking into consideration that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and ruling AKP fully controls Justice system and state’s institutions. Scheduled for June 23rd, 2019 elections in Istanbul will be a “stress test” for Turkish democratic principles and values. However, it is proved that loss of Istanbul municipality – the biggest Turkish city and trade hub which was under AKP control last 15 years – was a “bitter defeat” for Erdogan. Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. EC Progress Report on Turkey was disappointing “freezing” any further development regarding its accession process. Turkey strongly reacted in diplomatic and political level claiming that “Turkey belongs to Europe; Turkey is Europe.” Turkish Armed Forces declares its readiness to intervene militarily in Syria, eastern of Euphrates river but the US does not give the “green light”

aiming at protecting Syrian Kurds and YPG. Turkey is reinforcing its troops in the Turkish – Syrian borders waiting for the “green light” for establishing a safe zone in Syria but it is doubtful if it will ever get it. There are thoughts of unilateral action within Syria but such a decision may bring Turkish troops against the U.S forces; an unprecedented scenario. Syrian mortar strikes against forward Turkish outpost within Syria made Turkey to warn that if they continue it will hit back. Operation “Claw” against PKK in north Iraq continues. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. In Eastern Mediterranean Turkey escalates tension by sending a 2nd drillship (Yavuz) accompanied by Turkish Navy frigates. Production-sharing deal for the Aphrodite gas reservoir worth over 9 billion dollars over 18 years between Cypriot administration and Noble Energy excluding Turkish Cypriots from any profit it is assessed that it will lead in rapid escalation. Turkey is determined to react even with violence if its interests are harmed. The cost so far, for Turkey, is zero achieving simultaneously to question Cypriot sovereign rights. International reactions (US, EU etc) has limited in a couple of “warm words of support and sympathy” to Cyprus leaving initiative of action to Turkey. In this context, Turkey strengthened its diplomatic efforts to convince


international community for its fair rights in the maritime region. It is assessed that Turkey is fully determined to escalate tension in the region including armed violence (if it is necessary) aiming at securing its interests. Taking into consideration that Cyprus and Greece act in coordination and the latter guarantees defense and security of Cyprus it cannot be excluded an accidental or pre-planned “hot incident” in Cyprus or the Aegean Sea.


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NOTE

 Stable situation. No security risk.

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.

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

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

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