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SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE TO THOSE WHO SHAPE THE FUTURE

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

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

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ALBANIA: August 26th, Albania is one of six countries that have decided to extend sanctions against Russia over the annexation of Crimea. On June 18th, 2020 the European Council adopted an amendment that extends the existing restrictive measures until June 23rd, 2021. Albania joins Montenegro, Iceland, Norway, Ukraine, and Georgia which have also aligned themselves with the Council's decision. (www.exit.al)

- August 26th, the Albanian Government has confirmed Greece's right to expand its territorial waters in the Ionian Sea shared by Albania, Greece and Italy. The Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' statement that his country has an "*inalienable sovereign right*" to extend its territorial waters from six to 12 nautical miles. (www.exit.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political crisis in Albania remains active despite opposition's decision to soften its stance under international pressure. The fact is that the country suffers from deep institutional and constitutional crisis. Constitutional and judicial reforms are ongoing but results are not tangible yet. Besides, Albanian Government of Edi Rama faces allegations for oppressing media freedom, and human rights and challenging democratic values. Although Albania received last March the green light for the opening of accession negotiations by the EU, the first intergovernmental conference which signals the beginning of the process is doubtful due to Albanian inconsistency in fast forwarding reforms. Corruption, organized crime (and especially links of state's politics with organized crime), money laundering and smuggling

remain as "open sores" for the country. Judicial independence is seriously questioned in Albania since it is assessed that it is tooled by the Government.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

August 25th, Bosnia cannot tackle the migrant crisis unless its leaders reach a consensus on stopping them at the border with Serbia, the Head of Bosnia's Service for Foreigners' Affairs, Slobodan Ujic told N1 on Tuesday. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- August 29th, international rating agency Standard and Poor's affirmed credit rating of Bosnia and Herzegovina, "B" with a stable outlook, Bosnia's Central Bank confirmed on Saturday. According to Standard and Poor's, the global COVID-19 pandemic will weigh on the economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina and analysts project that the real GDP will contract by 6% in 2020, while the fiscal balance of payments performance may deteriorate. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Illegal migration turns to become the most significant problem of Bosnia bringing tension between entities. Currently, the Una-Sana, Sarajevo and Tuzla cantons carry the burden of migrants. Migration problem may become a major factor of instability in the country taking into consideration the fragile coexistence of the state's entities and interethnic relations. Bosnia continues to suffer from political instability and uncertainty due to complicated Bosnian political system and the state's non-flexible decision-making process. Each entity seeks to serve its own interests ignoring the state's interests leading quite often in po-

litical or economic deadlocks. Consequently, Bosnia is far behind other Western Balkan countries towards the EU integration process. It is not a secret that Bosnia faces several political and institutional deadlocks which slow down its economic performances, encourage entities' rivalries and nationalistic rhetoric, and put the country on permanent political instability. Republika Srpska's leaders have openly stated that they are in favor of secession from the Bosnian state. Of course such a scenario could destabilize the whole region of Western Balkans. Bosnia has become a vital field of rivalry between Russia and the West. Moscow estimates that Bosnia is a privileged region of action to establish influence. Taking into consideration that Southeastern Europe is a region fully controlled by the Euro-Atlantic forces only Bosnia and Serbia still offer "fertile soil" for Russian meddling in region's affairs. Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments.



BULGARIA: August 24th, the necessary 121 votes for the submission of a draft of a new Constitution will be collected, MP of the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria NFSB (Nacionalen Front za Spasenie na Bălgarija), Valentin Kasabov said. According to him, however, the question was whether 161 votes would be collected *"to launch the relevant changes."* (www.novinite.com)

- August 25th, the 47th day of anti-government protests in Sofia passed without escalation of tension. (www.novinite.com)

- August 26th, Danail Kirilov resigned as Minister of Justice after talks with Prime Minister Boyko

Borissov. The Prime Minister's decision on whether to accept the resignation will be made after talks with coalition partners, the Council of Ministers said in a statement. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Amending Bulgarian Constitution is a major challenge for ruling GERB and its collaborators. It helps the Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov to gain time and configure favorable conditions for changing political atmosphere. However, it is doubtful if GERB will finally achieve to amend the Constitution. Political and social tension is under control by the Government and it seems that Borissov's decision to avoid direct confrontation and violence with anti-government protesters was politically wise. The President, Rumen Radev has chosen to act more as an opposition political leader rather than the Head of state with a unifying role. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). However, military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.



CROATIA: August 27th, Independent Democratic Serb Party (Samostalna Demokratska Srpska Stranka - SDSS) leader Milorad Pupovac warned, after an attack on two young Serb men in Vukovar, about continuing ethnic conflicts. According to him, Violence has political background and it is politically sponsored. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- August 28th, the State Statistics Bureau released its figures for the second quarter of 2020 today. As expected Croatia's GDP dropped by a massive 15.1% due to the coronavirus lockdown. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- August 30th, the Government plans to draft a blueprint for an economic recovery plan by October, said Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic on Sunday. According to the Prime Minister, the recovery plan aims to get the economy back on track in the wake of the crisis caused by the pandemic (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Croatia enjoys political stability with a strong Government. Croatia's main concern is economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the Government works on a recovery plan aiming to strengthen the Croatian economy following the disastrous results of the COVID-19 pandemic. Croatia – Slovenia border dispute remains active, but COVID-19 pandemic have downsized current situation. Croatia is promoting lately the reconciliation policy between different ethnic groups in the country; mainly between Croats and Serbs. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. However, the current COVID-19 pandemic may affect the ambitious modernization plans due the economic repercussions in the country. Croatian Air Force is far from NATO standards and actually the country lacks an operational air power.



CYPRUS: August 24th, the Finance Ministry is sticking to its basic scenario of the

economy shrinking by 7% this year due to the fallout of the COVID-19 crisis, Minister Constantinios Petrides said on Monday. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- August 24th, the Varosha issue needs to be discussed in accordance with international law and UN resolutions as well as contribute to a Cyprus solution, Turkish Cypriot Mustafa Akinci has said. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- August 25th, President Nicos Anastasiades on Tuesday briefed UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Turkey's provocative actions both on Varosha and in the island's Exclusive Economic Zone. "Such an action underlines serious dangers and is the complete opposition to the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and will negatively affect any effort to restart talks from where they left off in Crans-Montana," Government Spokesman Kyriacos Kousios said in a written statement. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- August 27th, Foreign Minister Nicos Christodoulides has called on his EU counterparts to stand up for the values of the union amid heightened tensions with Turkey. On Thursday, he said that Turkey's actions threatened not only Greece and Cyprus, two EU member states, but also the interests of the EU itself. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- August 28th, a sea and air military exercise with the participation of forces France, Italy, Greece and Cyprus wraps up on Friday in an area south of Cyprus. Codenamed "Evnomia," the exercise includes surface vessels and submarines, as well as fighter aircraft from France and Greece stationed at the "Andreas Papandreou" air force base in Paphos. Six Greek F-16 took part on

Thursday, in missions between Crete and Cyprus. They took off from Chania, Crete. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- August 29th, Turkey said it will hold a military exercise off northwest Cyprus for the next two weeks, amid growing tension with Greece over disputed claims to exploration rights in the east Mediterranean. On Friday night Turkey issued a Navtex notice – an advisory message to mariners – saying it would be holding a “gunnery exercise” from Saturday until September 11th off northwest Cyprus. In response, Cyprus issued its own Navtex early Saturday. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- August 30th, Defense Minister Charalambos Petrides expressed hope on Sunday that Turkey would display the necessary good, allowing the resumption of UN-led talks for a settlement of the Cyprus problem. Petrides added that constant threats to open the fenced-off city of Famagusta would represent a substantive obstacle for the solution of the Cyprus problem, as well as for Ankara’s EU accession course. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus is strengthening its external balance seeking to tackle increased Turkish aggression due to Turkey’s plans for hydrocarbon drills within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In this context, Cyprus conducted a joint aeronautical exercise with Greek, French and Italian forces. It should be highlighted, that Greece sent 6 F-16 C/D fighter jets which landed on the Cypriot “Andreas Papandreou” airbase. It was a resounding message to Turkey that Greece is capable and determined to support militarily Cyprus with air and naval units. Moreover, Cyprus is

following a policy towards the EU aiming to transform the Cypriot – Turkish dispute into an EU – Turkish problem. This policy is in full line with the Greek one, while France fully supports the Cypriot – Greek actions. As long as Turkey is isolated from energy cooperation and alliances in the Eastern Mediterranean it would react aggressively seeking to gain an active role in the energy game. Unresolved Cypriot question complicates exploitation of energy resources in the region. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Another significant aggressive act by Turkey and Turkish Cypriot community which should be closely monitored is the intention of opening of the “ghost” city of Varosha; such an action could undermine any possibilities for dialogue regarding resolution of Cypriot question. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps size) which poses a permanent threat against the Cypriot republic. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: August 26th, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said Wednesday in Parliament that the Government will soon submit a bill extending Greece’s territorial waters in the Ionian Sea from 6 to 12 nautical miles. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- August 26th, NATO’s policy of equal distances is not just damaging to Greece but also to the cohesion of the military alliance and as such cannot be “accepted,” Greek Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos told NATO Secretary-General

Jens Stoltenberg on the sidelines of a meeting of European defense ministers in Berlin on Wednesday, according to the Ministry. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- August 27th, Greece has reacted to a decision by Turkey to extend for a second time a Navtex, or navigational telex, reserving a sea area in the Eastern Mediterranean for gas and oil surveys by its Oruc Reis vessel. *"It is once again proved who wants a de-escalation [of tensions] and who doesn't,"* a Foreign Ministry source told Kathimerini, adding that Ankara's calls for a dialogue with Athens are only *"a pretext."* (www.ekathimerini.com)

- August 27th, Greece's Iraklio Navtex station on the island of Crete on Thursday issued a counter-Navtex in response to Turkey's decision earlier in the day to extend an advisory reserving a sea area in the Eastern Mediterranean for gas and oil surveys by its *"Oruc Reis"* seismic exploration vessel. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- August 27th, Greek Parliament has ratified an agreement with Egypt which defines maritime boundaries between the two countries – a step which Turkey considers an affront. The deal, which has already been ratified by Egypt's Parliament (www.ekathimerini.com)

- August 27th, the US President Donald Trump held a second telephone call with Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on Wednesday following a first round of contacts with the Greek premier and Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Kathimerini reports. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- August 28th, Greece and the United Arab Emirates have begun joint air force training exercises

in the eastern Mediterranean, in the latest build-up of military forces in the region where Greece and Turkey are at odds over seabed mineral rights. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- August 28th, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias hailed on Friday his EU counterparts for an *"absolutely supportive"* attitude towards Greece and Cyprus in the face of Turkish actions in the Eastern Mediterranean. Dendias highlighted that Greece got an agreement for sanctions if Turkey will not de-escalate situation in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The war of NAVTEXs continues in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea between Greece and Turkey, while Greek Armed Forces remain in high readiness due to Turkish activity in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The Hellenic Navy is deployed following closely the Turkish vessels. Situation could be described as extremely dangerous since an accident or a minor incident could be evolved into an armed conflict. The EU and US express their support to Greece but without any concrete actions or sanctions against Turkey. Number of military exercises in the region has increased dramatically. The EU and US work for dialogue between the two sides but as long as Turkish research vessel is operating in Greek waters (continental shelf, EEZ), Greece is not willing to sit on the table for talks. Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced that the country will extend its territorial waters in the Ionian Sea from 6 to 12 miles. The Greek Government follows a very "energetic" policy seeking to secure the state's interests. Delimitation of EEZ with Italy and Egypt and exten-

sion of territorial waters in the western borders (with Italy and Albania) are considered as determined actions sending the message of national sovereignty mainly to Turkey. Of course, the idea of extending territorial waters in the Aegean Sea is not on the table yet since it is considered as an act of war by Turkey. Under current situation in Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea, Greece is forced to strengthen and modernize its Armed Forces operational capability.



KOSOVO: August 24th, the agenda of the forthcoming meeting on September 4th, 2020 at White House between Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic and Kosovo's Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti will focus on infrastructural projects worth more hundreds of millions of Euro, the Belgrade Politika daily reported on Monday. It added that the meeting, which would be mediated by President Donald Trump's special envoy might end in signing a letter of intent "that could cement the resumption of the dialogue" on the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- August 25th, European Commission Spokeswoman Nabila Massrali confirmed on Tuesday that the next meeting of experts from Belgrade and Pristina will be held on Thursday, Radio Free Europe reported. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- August 25th, Kosovo Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti signed financial agreements with the European Union which will secure 138 million Euro for Kosovo from IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) funds. The agreements also provide 40 million Euro in loans from international financial institutions. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- August 26th, Kosovo Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti said on Wednesday that delegations from Belgrade and Pristina would discuss economic issues in Brussels on Thursday. Pristina daily Koha quoted him as adding that a dialogue on mutual recognition would also be continued. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Talks on technical level have started in Brussels between Kosovo and Serbia but with limited results. However, Kosovo is preparing for talks with Serbia in Washington on September 4th, 2020. The US administration will facilitate negotiations between the two parts mainly for technical issues, although the Prime Minister, Avdullah Hoti claimed that Kosovo status is also on the table. It is said that the US administration will push for a tangible agreement while the US President, Donald Trump it might attend talks. Kosovo Government has secured EU funding in an effort to push forward infrastructure projects and stabilize economy. Kosovo parties have started consultations on the presidential candidates, although elections are far; in seven months. Fight against corruption, organized crime, money laundering, smuggling, trafficking, establishment of rule of law, accountable and transparent state institutions, and functional public administration are the main challenges for Kosovo towards its European path.



MOLDOVA: August 24th, the electoral period for the November 1st, 2020 presidential elections begins on August 25th, 2020. It is a period for preparing the elections with the Central Electoral Committee (CEC) to have the central role. The election campaign prior to the presiden-

tial elections begins not earlier than 30 days before the election day. (www.ipn.md)

- August 24th, a group of people, among whom Nistru war veterans, in a peaceful protest mounted in Chisinau on August 23rd, demanded that the Government and President Igor Dodon should resign. They expressed their support for the farmers who have not been heard by the authorities, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country moves towards social unrest due to economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social groups suffering from economic misery have started to protest in Moldovan streets asking for the Government and President resignation. One of the poorest European countries could collapse if does not receive financial aid by international stakeholders. The Moldovan Government enjoys fragile stability, while political instability and economic uncertainty reign in the country. Inadequate and dysfunctional institutions, corrupted state officials and public servants, absence of rule of law, money laundering, organized crime, smuggling, controlled justice and poor economic performances are the main challenges of Moldova affecting good governance and economic growth. Moldova has become a field of the ongoing rivalry for influence between the West (namely the EU and NATO) and Russia. The country is considered by the US and EU of great strategic importance being in the soft underbelly of Russia. On the other hand, Moldova is considered by Russia as an important region for its national security belonging by principle to its sphere of influence. Russia maintains troops in Transnistria which are considered by pro-western forces as violating Moldovan sovereignty. The

frozen conflict of Transnistria is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: August 30th,

Three opposition coalitions, For the Future of Montenegro (Za Budućnost Crne Gore), In Black and White (Crno na bijelo) and Peace is Our Nation (Mir je naša nacija), which announced cooperation after parliamentary elections will have at least 41 seats, according to the preliminary results of parliamentary elections held yesterday in Montenegro. Results show that Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore -DPS) has 29 seats, For the Future of Montenegro got 28 seats, Peace is Our Nation won 10 seats, In Black and White has 4 seats, Social Democrats of Montenegro (Socijaldemokrate Crne Gore – SD) and Bosniak Party (Bošnjačka Stranka – BS) has 3 seats, Social Democratic Party of Montenegro (Socijaldemokratska Partija Crne Gore - SDP) got 2 seats, and Albanian List (Albanska Lista), and Albanian Coalition (Albanska Koalicija) one seat each. (www.cdm.me)

- August 30th, leader of coalition For the Future of Montenegro (Za Budućnost Crne Gore), Zdravko Krivokapic, taking into consideration that opposition won 42 seats in the Parliament, has called for the establishment of an experts' Government, as the best solution for the country. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Parliamentary elections were held on August 30th, 2020 in Montenegro in a “highly polarized environment” according to the OSCE. Nevertheless, elections were fair and free without major

incidents. Preliminary results show a resounding political change in the country since the pro-western DPS of the state's President Milo Djukanovic despite its victory in the elections (29 seats) it seems that is losing its power as opposition got 41 seats (in the 81 seats Parliament) totally. Pro-Serbian and pro-Russian opposition is ready to form a Government bring significant political changes in the country and in the region. One could say that the big winner of these elections is not only opposition but the Serbian Orthodox Church which definitely influenced the electoral body demonstrating its power. On the other hand, it is a fact that DPS after 30 years in power had showed concrete signs of corruption and authoritarian practices. Besides, its open confrontation with the Orthodox Church was decisive for the electoral result. The new political reality in Montenegro it might have several geopolitical changes since it is created fertile soil for increased Serbian and Russian influence in the country. The state maintains high levels of corruption, organized crime, smuggling, money laundering, poor public administration transparency and accountability, corrupted politicians, absence of rule of law and problematic justice function.



NORTH MACEDONIA: August 26th, Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijalde-mokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) party leader and Prime Minister-designate, Zoran Zaev submitted to the Parliament his proposal for the new Government and its program. The new ruling coalition is consisted of SDSM (46 MPs), Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) (15 MPs) and Democratic Party of Albani-

ans (Demokratska Partija na Albancite – DPA) (1 MP). (www.mia.mk)

- August 26th, the Southeastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG) Headquarters (HQ) was activated in the city of Kumanovo, North Macedonia. HQ is based on the “Boro Menkov” military base. (www.mia.mk)

- August 30th, North Macedonia's Parliament resumes the debate on election of the new Government proposed by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijalde-mokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) party leader and Prime Minister-designate, Zoran Zaev. MPs session will be concluded with a vote for the Government nomination. (www.mia.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

North Macedonia is just one step before to get its new Government. Agreement of SDSM and DUI gives coalition the necessary parliamentary majority to secure the Government's support. Presenting the Government's program, Zoran Zaev expressed his commitment on the European orientation of the country, fight against corruption, cleansing of judiciary and economic growth. It is remarkable that the new cabinet includes Ministry of fighting corruption highlighting not only the Government's commitment to tackle the problem but also the problem's size. Ethnic Albanian DUI got privileged Ministries in the new Government such as the foreign affairs, economy and finance, while it got also the First Deputy Prime Minister. Despite formation of the new Government, opposition appears determined to challenge democratic stability of the country by setting obstacles in the normal work of the Parliament threatening to abstain from its sessions. It should be highlighted

that the main opposition party VMRO-DPMNE did not propose any of its MPs as Deputy Speaker of the Parliament. The main challenge of the new Government is the opening of accession negotiations with the EU in a rather favorable environment which strengthens North Macedonia's interests. Corruption, smuggling, rule of law and modernization of public administration remain as the major challenges for the state.



ROMANIA: August 24th, Marcel Ciolacu was elected Chair of the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) following the vote expressed by the 1460 delegations in the 39 regional centers organized as part of the extraordinary congress of the party. (www.nineoclock.ro)

- August 25th, the program to renew the Army's equipment must generate a re-launch of the Romanian defense industry, both through domestic companies, as well as through partner companies, said on Tuesday Prime Minister Ludovic Orban, in Petresti (Dambovită county), where he participated in the presentation of the project of IVECO company to build a truck assembly plant. (www.nineoclock.ro)

- August 27th, Romania's Parliament will vote the no-confidence motion against the Liberal Government of Ludovic Orban on Monday, August 31st, 2020. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Censure motion submitted by opposition PSD against the liberal Government of Ludovic Orban is going to be discussed in the Parliament on August 31st, 2020. According to PSD leader, Marcel

Ciolacu his party enjoys the necessary support by other opposition parties to topple the Government. The big question is the ethnic Hungarian party UDMR; if it supports the no confidence vote then the PNL Government will collapse. PSD appears strengthened after its party congress where Ciolacu was elected as the party leader. Romania enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia and its access to the Black Sea. NATO military force in Europe is gradually shifting from central Europe (Germany) to the east. It is assessed that such deployment of NATO forces is jeopardizing the balance of power in the region (Eurasia) and as recent history confirms, such plans are not remain unanswered by Russia. Russia's surrounding by NATO from the north to the south becomes increasingly stifling and Romania could become the central field of confrontation between Russia and NATO. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: August 24th, Serbian Chief of Staff General Milan Mojsilovic met in Moscow with his Russian counterpart Valeriy Vasilyevich Gerasimov to discuss the global and regional political and security situation, with focus on Kosovo, the Defense Ministry said in a press release on Monday. (www.n1info.com)

- August 26th, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic told Bosnian Serb leaders on Wednesday that the issue of the status of Bosnia's Serb-majority region can not be tied to that of Kosovo but that Serbia will insist on economic ties and the preservation of Bosnia's Constitution the way it was written in Dayton, Ohio, in 1995. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- August 29th, President Aleksandar Vucic said he was expecting a surprise at the upcoming Belgrade - Pristina talks in Washington, implying that this might mean mutual recognition of Serbia and Kosovo, and he stressed he would reject a meeting with US President Donald Trump if this actually happened. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Establishment of the new Government is still under consultations but the topic has been downgraded by Serbian media. Besides, the Serbian President and leader of SNS, Aleksandar Vucic is not in a hurry since he fully controls internal political landscape. It should be underlined that Vucic is trying to establish new balances within his party and such plan may cause internal tension in the near future. The EU and US express through various channels their concern over Serbia's democratic rule, media freedom and human rights. It is notable that Serbia has joined the EU declaration against the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's regime, despite the close relations between Belarus and Serbia. Moreover, Vucic rejected publically the view that Republika Srpska status is connected with the respective of Kosovo. It is assessed that these acts are related to Vucic's effort to balance between the west and Russia; a practice he implements from the very first moment he came in power. Belgrade is preparing for talks with Pristina on September 4nd, 2020 in Washington DC. It seems that Vucic is preparing the Serbian public opinion for a surprising agenda and a potential agreement between the two parts. However, the agenda is not known publically and citizens do not know what the two leaders will talk about. The EU has raised serious concerns over Serbia's effectiveness on

independence and accountability of the judiciary, freedom of expression, prevention of corruption and the fight against organized crime. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia so far.



SLOVENIA: August 24th, opposition Left (Levica) proposed to Parliament to call a consultative referendum on a bill envisaging 780 million Euros in defense expenditure in 2021 - 2026. The party argued money that would suffice to build several infection clinics, 170 care homes or 100,000 flats for the young will instead be spent on an imaginary enemy. Defense Minister Matej Tonin said this debate could actually be good, since “we will finally be able to talk about the Slovenian Armed Forces” and answer the question of “whether we want a Slovenian army or not.” (www.sta.si)

- August 25th, Aleksandra Pivec, the President of the coalition Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratska Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) lost a confidence vote at a session of the party's governing council but remains the leader for now. Pivec has come under fire after failing to pay for two of her recent ministerial trips around Slovenia which she combined with family time. (www.sta.si)

- August 26th, the Defense and Interior Ministries agreed to boost cooperation in guarding the state border. The Defense Ministry said it will tweak the rules and prepare four levels of deployment in line with provisions of the Defense Act which enable Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) members

to help the Police patrol the border without having any Police powers. The green level will signal the deployment of 150 soldiers along the border, the yellow level 400, the orange level 800 and the red level will mean 2,000 soldiers are to be deployed, reads the Ministry's press release. (www.sta.si)

- August 29th, Friday's anti-government protests were peaceful with police detecting only one violation of the public assembly act. Some 4,000 people gathered for the rally, according to Police data. The 19th weekly protest focused on environmental issues, criticizing the proposed new construction law and Environment Minister Andrej Vizjak, who according to the protesters turned the Ministry into an anti-environment Ministry. (www.sta.si)

- August 30th, the Government adopted a revised budget for 2020. With revenue down and expenditure soaring due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the budget deficit is projected to stand at 4.2 billion Euros or 9.3% of GDP. Revenue is planned at EUR 9.2 billion, almost 15% lower than in the currently valid budget, and expenditure at EUR 13.4 billion, nearly 30% higher, the Government Communications Office said. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Janez Jansa's Government enjoys relative stability despite anti-government protests in the country. COVID-19 pandemic has affected Slovenian economy as most countries in Europe. Slovenia – Croatia dispute regarding the Piran Bay is still active but without tension or escalation. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. According to the Armed Forces annual assessment the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities

ties in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. Adoption of an ambitious 780 million euro modernization project may improve operational capabilities of the Slovenian Armed Forces.



TURKEY: August 24th, Turkey is poised to produce a record amount of gold this year and the central bank will probably buy all of it — at prices near record highs. Production by one of the world's top buyers of the precious metal is expected to increase 16% to 44 tons this year, Hasan Yucel, the head of Turkey's Gold Miners Association, said in an interview. (www.aljazeera.com)

- August 26th, Turkey's Foreign Minister warned on Tuesday Greece against taking missteps in the Eastern Mediterranean, saying Turkey is ready to do “*whatever is necessary*” to protect its legitimate interests in the region. He also urged Greece not to “*put itself at risk*” by rising to the bait of “*some countries*” in the Eastern Mediterranean but instead to act in line with reason so there are no conflicts in the region. (www.dailysabah.com)

- August 27th, Turkey said on Thursday it will hold firing exercises in the eastern Mediterranean on Sept 1st – 2nd, 2020 the latest in a series of military drills which have fuelled tensions with Greece. (www.reuters.com)

- August 27th, Turkey donated on Thursday 12 new armored personnel carriers to the Somali military to support its fight against al-Qaeda affiliated group al-Shabaab. The vehicles will be used by Somalia's special unit, namely “*Gorgor*” (Eagle), trained and mentored by the Turkish Government. (www.aa.com.tr)

- August 28th, Pakistan praised on Thursday Turkey for its support for the people of Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. The Chairman of Pakistan's Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir, Shehryar Afridi, said Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's stance on Kashmir has helped to highlight the issue internationally. (www.dailysabah.com)

- August 28th, Turkey has decried a statement by seven European countries threatening sanctions against Ankara, amid its standoff with Greece over Eastern Mediterranean energy and maritime rights. Turkey's foreign ministry said on Friday that France, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Greece and Cyprus had adopted a viewpoint that was "disconnected from reality," "biased," and lacked a legal basis. (www.aljazeera.com)

- August 29th, the Turkish Navy late Friday issued a new Navtex, saying it will hold shooting exercises in the eastern Mediterranean south of the town of Anamur in Mersin province. According to the notice, the drill will be held between August 29th and September 11th, 2020. Anamur is located 73 kilometers (45 miles) north of the coast of Cyprus. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Turkey exercises its ambitious, multilateral external policy seeking to expand its influence and promote its national interests appearing as a regional power. The most significant achievement of Turkey so far is that is capable to support its plans and its words by actions. Currently, it supports by military personnel and weapons Libya and Azerbaijan, it has sent military forces in Syria, it has deployed its naval forces in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea and it exercises

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


restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted.


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NOTE

 *Stable situation. No security risk.*

 *Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.*

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

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

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