



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

**SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE**

**AT A GLANCE**



**SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE**

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

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

#### **“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE**

“HERMES” Institute of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy (“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE) is an independent, non – governmental, non – profit organization, consisting of scholars dedicated in the research and analysis of international affairs in regional and global level. The Institute aims at providing objective, scientific, and reliable research analysis through a variety of studies contributing effectively and constructively in the public dialogue and the evolution of scientific knowledge.

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**ALBANIA:** March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Prime Minister Edi Rama has accused the European Commission of interfering in Albania's elections to the benefit of the opposition and against his party. (www.exit.al)

- March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Albanian Government has signed a deal with the Turkish company "Keymen Ilaç Sanayi ve Ticaret A.Ş." to be provided with the Chinese "Sinovac" vaccine against the COVID-19. (www.exit.al)

- March 24<sup>th</sup>, the US Ambassador to Tirana Yuri Kim has slammed political leaders in Albania who have not publicly voiced concerns about MP Tom Doshi's (he was barred entry to the US in 2018 due to "involvement in significant corruption") running in the April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021 elections. (www.exit.al)

- March 25<sup>th</sup>, Isabel Santos the EU's rapporteur for Albania claimed in a press conference today that the controversial anti-defamation package has been withdrawn by the Albanian Government. The Albanian government has not made any public announcement of any kind relating to the law, what stage it is at, or whether it is still being considered. (www.exit.al)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*International pressure (namely the EU and US) has been increased towards Albanian parties due to the coming parliamentary elections of April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Eyes of European institutions such as the European Parliament and the European Commission, and the Council of Europe have focused on the coming elections. The US push Albanian parties to excluded any candidate with*

*criminal record, while the US Ambassador in Tirana, Yuri Kim is directly intervening Albanian internal affairs by asking the state's authorities to ban certain people from joining the elections as candidates. It seems that the Government is backing down from its controversial political decisions seeking to gain political favor of the EU and US. It is rather impressive and strange that an EU rapporteur (Isabel Santos) announced that a disputed law (the anti-defamation law) is withdrawn without an official announcement from the Government. Furthermore, Santos advocated in favor of the first intergovernmental conference between Albania and the EU claiming that Tirana has fulfilled all 15 conditions were set by the EU. However, the message from Brussels is very clear; fair and free elections will be the "key" factor for the beginning of the conference. These parliamentary elections are of critical importance for the country, since are considered as the way out of the long political crisis it suffers. The country continues to suffer from corruption, links between politicians and organized crime, drug smuggling, money laundering, violation of media freedom, weak democratic rule, absence of public administration transparency, and weak enforcement of rule of law. It should be underlined that the country has established legal framework for several issues as mentioned before but its executive bodies refuses or avoid from implement them. In the geopolitical field, Albania has developed very close relations with Turkey. The country has involved in several cases of illegal deportations of Turkish citizens fled in Albania in Turkish demand due to their alleged links with Fethullah Gulen and his organization which is considered as terrorist by Turkey. According to the Albanian justice and Ombudsman Albania has violated national and*

*international law regarding the asylum process and human rights. It seems that Albania is following unconditionally Turkish demands. Besides, Albanian economic dependence is steadily increased. It is notable that a Turkish private company undertook the project of providing for Albania the vaccine "Sinovac" against COVID-19, while the terms of the deal remained secret.*



## **BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:**

March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Embassy of Russia in Sarajevo said on Tuesday it sent "corresponding explanations" of its recent comment regarding NATO and Bosnia's potential steps towards joining the alliance, which sparked reactions including those of the main Bosniak (Muslim Bosnian) Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA) and Bosnia Presidency member Zeljko Komsic, to whom the explanations have been addressed. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- March 26<sup>th</sup>, the Bosniak (Muslim Bosnian) member of Bosnia and Herzegovina's tripartite presidency, Sefik Dzaferovic, said on Friday that connecting the refinery in Bosanski Brod to Croatia's gas network was a violation of BiH's territorial integrity and that the project was never agreed to between the two countries. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- March 25<sup>th</sup>, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina unanimously determined the Draft Law on the Budget of Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and International Obligations of Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2021, which the Ministry of Finance and Treasury will submit to the Presidency of BiH. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- March 28<sup>th</sup>, on the occasion of the upcoming negotiations on changes to the Election Law, Milorad Dodik stated that he would demand the President of the Republika Srpska (RS) entity to become a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) at the same time. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** :

*Amid national and international reactions of the surprising statement of the Russian Ambassador in Sarajevo that Russia will consider the approach of Bosnia with NATO as a hostile act, the Russian Embassy sent a letter of explanations to certain correspondents seeking to downgrade the incident. Moscow made clear its intentions for the Bosnia and Southeastern Europe generally confirming that a struggle for power and influence unfolds in the region. Political change in Montenegro made situation in the Balkans more complicated, since currently Russia enjoys political support in Serbia, Montenegro and Republika Srpska achieving to establish a significant pro-Russian group. Experts do not exclude attempts of destabilization of the country by the Russian factor. Serbia and Croatia continues to treat Bosnia as their protectorate interfering in its internal affairs. Bosnia is far from joining the EU since the country suffers from high rates of corruption, absence of rule of law, difficulties in respect of human rights, weak public administration, democratic deficit and its economic performance is one of the lowest in Europe. The decision-making system of the country is an important obstacle for accelerating state's reforms and bringing Bosnia in the European path. Current political and geopolitical situation not only in the region, but also in*

*Europe favors the acceleration of the accession process in EU and NATO. Current political situation in Bosnia could be instrumentalized by the rival political forces raising nationalist rhetoric for their internal goals and interests.*



**BULGARIA:** March 22<sup>nd</sup>, Bulgaria's Foreign Ministry has notified the Russian Embassy in Sofia that it has declared two Russian diplomats "persona non grata" and given them 72 hours to leave the country, Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva said on Twitter social media. (www.sofiaglbe.com)

- March 25<sup>th</sup>, the Council of Ministers adopted the National Migration Strategy of Bulgaria for the 2021 - 2025 period, the Government Information Service said. The document provides a policy framework for setting up a comprehensive and stable regulatory and institutional basis for successfully managing regular migration and integration, for providing asylum seekers and international protection beneficiaries in Bulgaria with the requisite care, and for preventing and suppressing irregular migration. (www.novinite.com)

- March 28<sup>th</sup>, Bulgaria expects North Macedonia to fulfill the criteria for membership in the EU, including by respecting the rights of people with Bulgarian identity. (www.novinite.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

*One week prior the parliamentary elections scheduled for April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, situation in the country is calm without polarization. Bulgaria has suffered from protests last year due to state*

*officials' corruption and control of justice by the government. Taking into consideration current political situation, surprises could not be excluded in the electoral race. There are those who claim that the April 4<sup>th</sup> vote would be a protest vote, while some others strongly support the view that ruling GERB will win once again the elections. The new espionage case engaging Bulgarian military intelligence officers and Russian diplomats adds another "thorn" in the two countries relations. Bulgaria has expelled several Russian diplomats since 2019, while Russia replies with reciprocal measures. It is estimated that Bulgaria has been targeted by Russia due to its critical geographical position regarding the Black Sea region and because it is a NATO member with access to critical information. Although the US, UK and NATO supported Bulgarian reaction in the espionage case there is skepticism regarding the intelligence leak. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). Military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force.*



**CROATIA:** March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Standard & Poor's agency has affirmed its "BBB-" credit rating on Croatia, with a stable outlook, the Government said on Tuesday. (www.hr.n1info.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

*Croatia enjoys political stability and this fact was confirmed by S&P's assessment on country's economic growth. In short, political stability brings economic stability and Croatia achieved positive economic rates. COVID-19 pandemic has*

affected Croatian economy badly (as most European countries) but recovery is feasible for Croatia based on tourism. Accession in the Schengen Zone and Eurozone is a strategic goal since it will benefit the state regarding economy, trade, and security. Illegal migration in borders with Bosnia remains a major problem for the country, despite the significant reduce of migrants last two months. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



**CYPRUS:** March 22<sup>nd</sup>, normalization of EU - Turkey relations will remain extremely challenging in the absence of a solution to the Cyprus issue, the EU High Representative Josep Borrell said in his report on Ankara's relations with the bloc, which will be discussed on Monday at the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC). ([www.cyprus-mail.com](http://www.cyprus-mail.com))

- March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the cabinet approved a proposal for a single referendum to be held on local authority reform which discussion has been dragging on for years amid opposition from political parties and certain communities. ([www.cyprus-mail.com](http://www.cyprus-mail.com))

- March 25<sup>th</sup>, Foreign Minister, Nikos Christodoulides, has said that April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021 when an informal conference on Cyprus begins in Geneva, constitutes a crucial milestone for the Cyprus problem and EU - Turkey relations, as Turkey's behavior will be evident in practice. ([www.cyprus-mail.com](http://www.cyprus-mail.com))

- March 25<sup>th</sup>, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has announced the appointment of Major General Ingrid Gjerde of Norway as Force

Commander of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).



UNFICYP Force Commander, Major General  
Ingrid Gjerde

(Photo source: [www.unficyp.unmissions.org](http://www.unficyp.unmissions.org))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*Nicosia has achieved through its diplomatic activity to transform the Cypriot question from a state's problem into an EU issue. This was confirmed by the EU High Representative Josep Borrell who said that Cypriot question resolution is vital for normalization of relations between the EU and Turkey. This approach is very important just a month before the 5+1 informal meeting for the Cypriot question scheduled for April 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Expectations are very low since the two sides go to the meeting with substantial disagreements. Cypriot side advocates the solution of a bicomunal – bizonal federation with decentralized competencies for the federal parts, while the Turkish Cypriot community supports the idea of two independent and sovereign states. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize). As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island,*

*Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.*



**GREECE:** March 22<sup>nd</sup>, Greece considers Monday's report by the European Commission and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell on Turkey "positive and balanced," according to diplomatic sources, as it includes a lot of satisfactory points even if there are "some deficiencies." (www.ekathimerini.com)

- March 28<sup>th</sup>, given the significant reduction in migrant flows, the EU is expected to slash funds to Greece to 1 billion Euros for 2020-27 from 3.5 billion Euros in the previous period, according to sources at the Migration Ministry. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- March 28<sup>th</sup>, Washington's intention to support Athens was reportedly made loud and clear in the telephone call between the US President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis last Thursday on the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Greek War of Independence. (www.ekathimerini.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

*The EU halted sanctions to Turkey under the German pressure due to its aggression in the eastern Mediterranean against Greece and Cyprus; two EU member states. Although Greece appeared satisfied with the outcome of the European Council's session held on March 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021 it is assessed that Athens (and Nicosia) was forced to compromise due to Berlin's persistence to strengthen trade ties with Turkey. Although the EU said that sanctions are always*

*on the table, it could be said that Turkey is benefited after its last year's aggressive policy against Greece and Cyprus in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea due to the EU's reluctance to show commitment in implementing its threats. Greece implements an ambitious project for strengthening the Armed Forces seeking to modernize the Navy and Air Force power by purchasing new frigates and fighter jets.*



**KOSOVO:** March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Self-Determination Movement's (Lëvizja Vetëvendosje – LVV) leader Albin Kurti said on Monday that Pristina cannot normalize relations with Belgrade unless it recognizes Kosovo. (www.n1.info.com)

- March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Kosovo Assembly has elected the country's seventh Government since the country declared independence in 2008, and its second led by the Self-Determination Movement's (Lëvizja Vetëvendosje – LVV) leader Albin Kurti. Kurti's cabinet will have 15 Ministries and three Deputy PMs. Kurti named Serb List (Srpska Lista) leader Goran Rakic minister of Local Communities and Return and Emilija Redzeqi from the Bosniak minority Minister of Minorities and Human Rights as well as Fakrim Damka from the Turkish minority Minister of Regional Development. (www.prishtinainsight.com)

- March 26<sup>th</sup>, Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti said on Friday that missing people will be a priority in Pristina's relations with Belgrade. (www.rs.n1info.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :



*LVV leader, Albin Kurti formed his Government and got a confidence vote from the Parliament enjoying support by minority parties. Although his cabinet is considered as stable enjoying support of 66 MPs in the 120 seats Parliament, election of the Kosovo President could topple the Government under certain conditions. In short, Kurti does not control the 2/3 of the Parliament to secure the election of a President of his preference (namely current acting President Vjosa Osmani) and in such a case Parliament could be dissolved and new elections to be called. Kurti announced his priorities emphasizing in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, fighting poverty and reforming justice. Speaking for the Belgrade – Prishtina dialogue he made clear that Serbia should recognize Kosovo and then normalization of relations could be reached. Kurti strongly emphasizes the issue of missing people; an issue already in the two parts dialogue agenda. Organized crime, corruption, money laundering, weak public administration, absence of rule of law, controlled justice, transactions between politicians and criminals are persistent “open sores” for Kosovo.*



**MOLDOVA:** March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the presidential decree by which Igor Grosu was designated as a candidate for premiership is constitutional. The Constitutional Court rejected the challenge filed by the Socialist MPs, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the candidate for Prime Minister Igor Grosu, who was nominated by President Maia Sandu, filed the documents regarding his team and Government program to Parliament. (www.ipn.md)

- March 25<sup>th</sup>, a lack of quorum was ascertained in Parliament after the MPs of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) and the Pro Moldova (Pro Moldova), which includes the MPs of the Sor Party (Partidul “ȘOR”), left the Assembly hall. They said they do not want to take part in the examination of the Government program and the Cabinet proposed by candidate for Prime Minister Igor Grosu, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- March 26<sup>h</sup>, the President of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) Igor Dodon said the PSRM will not allow holding snap parliamentary elections during the pandemic, in May - June. According to him, at least 1 million doses of vaccine will be bought and 300,000 - 400,000 citizens will be immunized and the snap elections are now out of the question, no matter what wishes President Maia Sandu has, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- March 27<sup>th</sup>, President Maia Sandu is bewildered at the objections of some of the parliamentary parties to the presidential administration. She noted she offered the parliamentary groups the possibility of investing the Gavrilita Government or the Grosu Government and this chance was missed by Parliament. She will wait for the Constitutional Court’s decision on the circumstances for dissolving Parliament and, depending on the pandemic situation in the country, will decide whether to sign the decree on the dissolution of the legislature and calling of snap elections or not, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

**COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**  :

*Constitutional Court's decision to consider the President, Maia Sandu's decree to designate Igor Grosu as the candidate for premiership is constitutional made situation more complicated instead of facilitating political procedures. Political crisis continues in Moldova despite the Constitutional Court's decision. Opposition namely PSRM, PRO MOLDOVA and SOR Party are opposing in the idea of snap elections, while Sandu is seeking to dissolve the Parliament calling early elections. Her goal is to change political balance in the Parliament as she assesses that her party, PAS, will become the major political force in the Moldovan Assembly. The outcome of this deep political crisis is that the country has a Government with limited powers amid the COVID-19 pandemic and a society moving to the edge of poverty. It could be said that parliamentary majority still controls situation even if the Parliament is dissolved. In short, Sandu should start thinking of holding serious consultations with opposition to reach an agreement for the country's best interest. Moldovans are fed up with corrupted political elite which is interested only in its privileges ignoring social needs and demands. Political turbulence in Moldova has also geopolitical aspects. The west namely the EU, US and NATO strongly support political change in the country favoring the pro-western PAS as the leading force, while Russia is seeking to maintain current political balance (PSRM) which favors its political plans. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.*



**MONTENEGRO:** March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the reason for a possible Government reshuffle

should not be a power struggle within the ruling majority, but the issues of inclusiveness and representation of minorities, said Civic Movement United Reform Action (Građanski Pokret Ujedinjena Reformska Akcija - URA) MP Bozena Jelusic. (www.rtcg.me)

- March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Democratic Front (Demokratski Front - DF) will not vote for any law, not even for the budget for this year, until the prosecutorial laws are adopted in the form in which they were proposed, said the Movement for Changes (Pokret Za Promjene - PZP) leader and one of the DF officials, Nebojsa Medojevic. (www.rtcg.me)

- March 24<sup>th</sup>, the Italian and Russian ENI - NOVATEK consortium starts exploratory drilling tomorrow. It should show whether there is oil in the Montenegrin offshore, the Ministry of Capital Investments has told CdM. (www.cdm.me)

- March 28<sup>th</sup>, Montenegro's Prime Minister, Zdravko Krivokapic, said in social media that Montenegro will remain safe and stable despite the efforts of certain organizations and groups provoking incidents, thus wanting to project the image of threatened security in the country. (www.cdm.me)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**   :

*Information on possible Government's reshuffle confirms that the Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic is trying to balance the ruling coalition's political forces. Besides, the DF is claiming that it will not support any of the cabinet's laws in the Parliament unless the prosecutorial law is adopted; a law that the EU is strongly opposes. Weakness of adoption of this law by the Government could provoke the first*

*serious intergovernmental crisis; however, the Government is considered as stable. Announcement of Krivokapic that certain groups and organizations seek to destabilize the country is heard as a warning. Besides, "HERMES" has already assessed that under current circumstances, turbulence and political provocation against the Government motivated by foreign circles aiming to topple the ruling coalition could not be excluded. The EU and US consider the Montenegrin ruling coalition as pro-Russian setting a threat for the Southeastern Europe political and security stability. Although, Montenegro is a NATO member and is in the process of accession negotiation with the EU, the two organizations are suspicious towards the Government. NATO appears determined to harden its stance against its member states which are considered as potential sources of the Alliance secret intelligence leaks and Montenegro could be one of these countries. Montenegro needs concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Montenegro is closer to the EU accession than any other Western Balkan country but current political situation puts at risk its European future.*



**NORTH MACEDONIA:** March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Prime Ministers of North Macedonia and Bulgaria, Zoran Zaev and Boyko Borisov, spoke on the phone and issued similar statements insisting that the 2017 treaty they signed will be the basis for resolving the growing historic and

national identity disputes between the countries. (www.republika.mk)

- March 23<sup>rd</sup>, The North Macedonia's Government reviewed and adopted the text of the agreement with Greece on the construction of the interconnector for transfer of natural gas and authorized the Minister of Economy Kreshnik Bekteshi to sign the agreement with Greece. (www.mia.mk)

- March 25<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev is set to meet with his coalition partner Ali Ahmeti and the Speaker Talat Xhaferi today, to discuss the problems their coalition is having with adopting any legislation in the Parliament. The ruling majority has 62 votes, and it takes 61 to convene a session of Parliament meaning that any illness or travel in their ranks blocks the Parliament. (www.republika.mk)

- March 25<sup>th</sup>, Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs Nikola Dimitrov welcomed the adoption of the European Parliament's resolution on North Macedonia's EU accession but he expressed his regret for not including in the final text condemnation of Bulgaria's provocative actions against North Macedonia. (www.mia.mk)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

*The ruling majority is facing problems of Parliament's functionality due to lack of quorum in its sessions. In short, the Government cannot pass laws due to the lack of quorum setting obstacles to the governmental work. Current situation could be described as a democratic deficit which is not unknown in western Balkan countries. It is a very common practice for opposition to block the Parliament's works*

aiming to destabilize the Government. It happened in Albania and in Montenegro; it happens in North Macedonia as well. Dispute between Bulgaria and North Macedonia has blocked the latter's opening of accession negotiations. Although the EU member states support Skopje and try to put pressure on Sofia to change its political stance, the European Parliament avoided officially criticizing the Bulgarian stance in the resolution that it was adopted. North Macedonia is obliged to compromise with Bulgaria if it really seeks to hold its first intergovernmental conference in June or July 2021. National census is another significant challenge for the ruling coalition and despite governmental assurances that the process will be implanted normally and without delays, it is still not certain that census will be held as it was planned. Although Zaev gained some political time with the confidence vote a couple of weeks ago, the Government is not so powerful and stable.



**ROMANIA:** March 24<sup>th</sup>, the President of the Chamber of Deputies and National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) leader, Ludovic Orban, said that there is also the possibility for him to run for the state's presidency, adding that the PNL must support the candidate who enjoys the greatest confidence and has the best chance to win the presidential election. (www.nineoclock.ro)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Despite internal disputes in PNL the ruling coalition is maintain its cohesion confirming its viability and stability. Fight against corruption and independent justice are the main challenges*

*for the country. Romania enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO. After redeployment of the US military forces from Germany, Romania is upgrading into the advanced bastion of NATO against Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries and the Alliance perceiving it as a threat against its national security.*



**SERBIA:** March 22<sup>nd</sup>, Aleksandar Vulin, Serbia's Interior Minister, told the Swiss Ambassador to Serbia Urs Schmid that Belgrade would work "actively" to prevent Pristina from submitting a request to join INTERPOL. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 24<sup>th</sup>, Ivica Dacic, Serbia's Parliament Speaker, said he was ready for the resumption of dialogue with the opposition under the European Parliament (EP) auspices, but he did not know when that would happen. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 18<sup>th</sup>, the World Bank said that it had approved 62.5 million Dollars to finance the first stage of project to modernize the Serbian railway system. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 24<sup>th</sup>, President Aleksandar Vucic told UN Office Belgrade Chief Mari Yamashita that Serbia is prepared for dialogue and compromise in regional issues, including Kosovo. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 26<sup>th</sup>, Internal Affairs Minister Aleksandar Vulin said on Friday that Serbia should review its policy towards the EU following the latest European Parliament report. Vulin said that official Belgrade should review its policy of military neutrality and expand it to political neutrality. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 27<sup>th</sup>, Culture and Information Minister, Maja Gojkovic, said that the European Parliament's Resolution, which contains the assessments of the EP rapporteur for Serbia, Vladimir Bilcik, was "surprising" and seems "inconsistent" with situation in Serbia. (www.rs.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*A rather disappointing report on Serbia by the European Parliament's rapporteur Vladimir Bilcik has frustrated Serbian authorities. The report focuses on media freedom, rule of law, state of democracy, economy, normalization of relations with Kosovo and function of Serbian Parliament. Inter-party dialogue is led into a deadlock with both sides (the Government and extra-parliamentary opposition) accusing of each other. Opposition is determined to go on the streets starting a row of protests aiming to destabilize the ruling coalition. Realizing the close relations between Belgrade – Moscow and the strong influence Serbia exercises in Montenegro and Bosnia it is assessed that there are foreign actors which would seek to destabilize or topple the Serbian Government aiming to establish a new political reality in the country. In Kosovo – Serbia dialogue Belgrade appears ready for talks and compromise. Establishment of the new Kosovo Government could trigger a meeting between Vucic and Kurti under the EU*

*mediation. Corruption, organized crime, public administration accountability, media freedom are the main internal challenges for the country. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.*



**SLOVENIA:** March 25<sup>th</sup>, Culture Minister Vasko Simoniti survived a vote of no-confidence mounted by the center-left opposition over several grievances, including his inaction during the epidemic and attitude to the self-employed and public media. (www.sta.si)

- March 26<sup>th</sup>, four MPs, including Speaker Igor Zorcic, formed a new deputy faction in Parliament after three of them parted ways with the coalition Modern Centre Party (Stranka Modernega Centra - SMC) and one left the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratska Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) deputy group. Zorcic indicated in a statement for the press that he would not step down as speaker. (www.sta.si)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*The minority Government of Janez Jansa enjoys fragile stability. Slovenia is prepared for taking over the EU presidency from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. Media freedom in Slovenia has been put under the EU microscope and is monitored closely. Besides, it is not a secret that the Slovenian Government together with the Hungarian and Polish ones are considered by Brussels as a "thorn" for the EU. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. Their operational readiness is under*

*question and it is assessed that they cannot accomplish their mission. Currently, Slovenia has joined several military projects seeking to modernize its Armed Forces.*



**TURKEY:** March 22<sup>nd</sup>, Turkey's lira plunged 15% to near its all-time low on Monday following President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's shock weekend decision to sack a hawkish Central Bank Governor and install a like-minded critic of high interest rates. (www.aljazeera.com)

- March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the EU should start negotiations on deeper trade ties with Turkey but be ready to impose economic sanctions if Ankara moves against the bloc's interests, according to a report prepared for a summit of EU leaders this week. The offer of closer economic links, mixed with threats, reflects the complex relationship between Turkey, an EU candidate, and the world's largest trading bloc, which have drifted apart but are now seeking improved ties. (www.aljazeera.com)

- March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the NATO alliance could emerge stronger after a period of internal divisions and must keep Turkey at the heart of trans-Atlantic ties, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday. (www.dailysabah.com)

- March 24<sup>th</sup>, Emmanuel Macron has stepped up his rhetoric against Turkey once again, after a period of relatively calmer ties between Paris and Ankara, warning against any attempts to interfere in next year's French presidential elections. (www.aljazeera.com)

- March 25<sup>th</sup>, Turkey has raised the issue of Uighur Muslims during talks with China's Foreign Minister in Ankara, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said, as hundreds of

Uighurs protested against the treatment of their ethnic kin in China. (www.aljazeera.com)

- March 28<sup>th</sup>, Turkey's "Asia Anew Initiative," which seeks to diversify the country's diplomatic relations, has not only enhanced its ties with the continent but has also established a framework to outline and coordinate institutional mechanisms to further reinforce ties. Ankara's decision to launch the initiative was the right step in today's multipolar world and besides its economic and political benefits the initiative may also contribute to Turkey's growing role in humanitarian crises in the region, according to experts. (www.dailysabah.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

*Turkey continues its active role in a multilateral and multifaceted foreign policy including soft and hard power simultaneously. It is not a secret that the country is acting as a regional power having a say in all vital issues in Central Asia, Middle East, North and Western Africa, Southeastern Europe and Caucasus. It should be underlined that despite the Ankara – Washington deteriorating relations, US top officials keep on praising the role of Turkey in the western security architecture. In fact, the US after decision to withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan assigned Turkey to hold peace talks between the Afghani Government and Taliban. Ankara has appointed a special envoy to act as mediator between the two parts. Furthermore, Turkey enjoys central role in talks for the future of Syria (together with Russia and Iran), while it maintains significant military force in North Syria securing the Turkish interests. The new political era in Libya continues to favor Turkey, since the new interim Government supports Ankara's role*


*in Libyan issues. After the “catchy” motto of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan “The world is bigger than five” expressing the Turkish aspirations for regional supremacy, the ambitious initiative “Asia Anew Initiative” confirms that the country seeks to expand its influence in new horizons. In this context, Turkish officials visited Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan emphasizing the Turkic ethnicity. Besides, it is still active the doctrine “two states, one nation” describing the Azerbaijan – Turkey relations. In other words, Turkey is investing in the Turkic element for expanding its influence and consolidating a leading role among neighboring countries. Relations with the EU are warming again under the pressure of Germany which sees in Turkey a large market seeking access. On the contrary, French interests are colliding with the Turkish ones and as a result tense rhetoric between the two states is escalating. A thorn in Turkish aspirations for regional supremacy is its economy and the hard hit Turkish Lira. Inflation is in its highest rates, while Lira lost 15% of its worth last week. Turkish citizens are almost desperate due to high prices of ordinary goods. In short, Lira crisis threatens Erdogan’s long reign. Democratic rule and human rights are further deteriorating in Turkey. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts.*


www.hermesresearch.eu


email: info@hermesresearch.eu


Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas


## NOTE

 *Stable situation. No security risk.*

 *Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.*

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

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

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