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**Hermes Institute of
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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 31st, Albanian President Ilir Meta has asked Prime Minister Edi Rama to inform the public on the Government's planned actions following Greece's announcement of intention to extend territorial waters from 6 to 12 nautical miles. (www.exit.al)

- September 2nd, the Bank of Albania (BoA) has argued that the COVID-19 crisis did not affect the banking sector in the country. A report covering the first half of 2020, approved on Wednesday by the BoA Supervisory Council, stated that the banking sector developed steadily, and its financial indicators remained at good levels as a result of measures taken by the Government and the banking sector itself. (www.exit.al)

- September 6th, Albanians will go to the polls on April 25th, 2021 to elect their representatives in Parliament. President Ilir Meta decreed the date on Sunday, following consultations with party leaders last week. (www.exit.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Parliamentary elections were officially announced for April 25th, 2021. Elections are assessed as the only way to re-establish political order and stability in the country terminating a long period of institutional and constitutional crisis. It is not a secret that the Socialist Government of Edi Rama has developed a "hybrid" regime meaning authoritarian practices, media oppression and controlled justice. Parliamentary order has been vehemently disturbed by opposition which was withdrawn from the Parliament in an act of political protest. Civil society is like a "volcano" ready to explode due to social upheaval, economic scandals, allegations for the Gov-

ernment's link with organized crime and violation of human rights. Institutional and constitutional crisis has affected the European prospect of Albania. 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:

September 2nd, the Chairman of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency Sefik Dzaferovic and Bosnia's Foreign Affairs Minister Bisera Turkovic asked authorities in Montenegro to ensure protection for Bosniaks (Muslim Bosnians) living there following a series of attacks and threats they have endured throughout the past several days since the election in the country took place. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- September 3rd, the Serb member of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency Milorad Dodik expressed support for Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic in his talks in Washington, adding that should the White House demand that Serbia grants Kosovo recognition, it would also raise the issue of the status of Bosnia's Serb-majority Republika Srpska (RS) region. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

A series of attacks against Muslim Bosnian (Bosniaks) minority in Montenegro following the elections and the defeat of DPS, have raised concerns over the security and human rights of the small community. Attacks are attributed to the electoral victory of pro-Serbian coalition in Montenegro and the rise of nationalism in the country. Besides, Bosnian Serb entity leader, Milorad Dodik has raised once again the issue of republika Srpska status following talks between Belgrade and Pristina, and a potential recognition of Kosovo. According to Dodik, independence of Kosovo is connected with RS status. Such statements of Bosnian Serbs confirm the fragile balance in the country which constantly threatens peace, unity and stability of Bosnia. Illegal migration turns to become the most significant problem of Bosnia bringing tension between entities. 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. Without the pressure of international community (namely the EU and US) and its close presence in Bosnia through the OHR administration Bosnia could have been dissolved (violently or not). 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. Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments.



BULGARIA: September 1st, unemployment in Bulgaria in July 2020 was 4.4%, unchanged from June, according to seasonally-adjusted figures published on September 1st, 2020 by EU statistics agency Eurostat. Bulgaria has entered the top five of the EU countries with the lowest unemployment (www.sofiaglobe.com, www.novinite.com)

- September 2nd, Bulgaria's Interior Ministry announced that 35 people were arrested during clashes in capital city Sofia as anti-government protesters tried to breach a Police cordon around the National Assembly, holding its first sitting of the autumn session. The September 2nd protest was billed by organizers as a “grand national uprising,” who in the late afternoon claimed more than 9000 people were taking part. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- September 3rd, Bulgaria's National Assembly voted to approve the appointment of Dessislava Ahladova as Justice Minister, replacing Danail Kirilov, who resigned last week. The motion passed with 98 MPs in favour, 45 opposed and one abstention. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- September 4th, Bulgaria's economy declined by 10% in the second quarter of 2020, according to preliminary data announced by the National Statistical Institute (NSI) exceeding the statistics body's earlier flash estimate that put the drop at 9.8%. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

GERB's proposal for amending Constitution (and the electoral code) is not certain that it will pass in the Parliament and the Grand National Assem-

bly. Borissov's ruling coalition has not achieved to get the necessary support yet for securing its proposal. In the meanwhile, anti-government protests continue in the country, while Police was reacted violently last week signaling a change in its stance. Political stability in the country is fragile and an accidental incident could deteriorate situation rapidly. The Prime Minister is working on gaining time. The President, Rumen Radev has chosen to act more as an opposition political leader rather than the Head of state with a unifying role. The COVID-19 pandemic is pushing the Bulgarian economy which was declined by 10% in the 2nd Quarter of 2020. 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: September 1st, Slovenia supports Croatia's bids to join the eurozone and the passport-free Schengen area, which will be good both for Croatia and for Slovenia, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said in an interview with Slovenian television following the Bled Strategic Forum on Monday when he met his Slovenian counterpart, Janez Jansa. (www.hina.hr)

- September 3rd, Croatian National Bank (HNB) governor Boris Vujcic said on Thursday that although the COVID-19 pandemic strongly affected Croatia's economy and public finances, the introduction of the euro on January 1st, 2023 was feasible. (www.hina.hr)

- September 4th, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Zdravko Maric met in the Gov-

ernment offices on Thursday with the US Ambassador to Croatia Robert Kohorst, who presented a draft double taxation agreement, the Government said in a press release. The agreement will provide additional security for taxpayers, primarily people with dual citizenship, prevent double payments of tax, and protecting them from any discriminatory procedures. (www.hina.hr)

- September 4th, this year's economic decline will not be as sharp as originally estimated, a full recovery is expected by 2022, and our goal is to leave the crisis behind as soon as possible, Finance Minister Zdravko Maric said on Friday in Opatija, where he attended the Croatian Money Market conference. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Croatia enjoys political stability with a strong Government. Croatia's main concern is economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Finance Minister full economic recovery will be achieved in 2022, while the country seeks to join eurozone by January 1st, 2023. Croatia – Slovenia border dispute remains active, but COVID-19 pandemic have downsized current situation. Surprisingly, Slovenia appears ready to promote Croatia's accession to the eurozone and Schengen zone; an issue which Slovenia has threatened to use it for pushing Croatia to implement the arbitration tribunal rule on Piran Bay dispute. 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: September 1st, Justice Minister Emily Yiolitis urged Parliament to make justice reform its priority or risk delaying much-needed changes for another year. The reform bills had been submitted to Parliament by former minister Ionas Nicolaou before his resignation in May 2019 over the serial killer debacle. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- September 1st, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has sent a letter to President Nicos Anastasiades saying no action should be taken in the fenced-off area of Famagusta known as Varosha, that are not in line with Security Council resolutions. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- September 1st, the US has decided to partially lift an arms embargo against Cyprus, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told President Nicos Anastasiades during a phone call on Tuesday evening. The partial lifting of the embargo will last for one year – with the possibility of renewal – and applies to non-lethal systems. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- September 1st, companies licensed to operate in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone have not made further changes to their drilling schedules in relation to the COVID-19 situation, Energy Minister Natasa Pilides said on Tuesday. Pilides recalled that oil and gas companies had already previously informed the Government of an approximately one-year delay in operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but added that there is now no talk of further postponements beyond that. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus continues to face Turkish aggression due to Turkey's plans for hydrocarbon drills within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Turkish activity in Cyprus is linked with the respective activity in Greek waters which has raised tension in Eastern Mediterranean dramatically. While Greece has deployed its Armed Forces, Cyprus has engaged in a marathon diplomatic campaign to get international support and solidarity. President, Nicos Anastasiades pushes further his EU counterparts got becoming stricter against Turkey seeking to reduce its activity. Despite Cypriot diplomatic efforts, Turkey conducts hydrocarbon drills in Cyprus' waters whenever and wherever it wishes without any substantial countermeasures from Cyprus. 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. France presence in the region is upgraded with naval and air forces. Cyprus lacks aeronautical assets to deter Turkey from its illegal activities. It seeks to balance its military weakness through "external counterbalance" through alliances and strategic cooperation with other countries. 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. Lately, Cyprus tries to "internationalize" the issue seeking to highlight Turkish violation. Lift of arms embargo (only in non lethal means) by the USA signals a strong message for the upgrade of

Cypriot – US relations. 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: September 1st, Athens is on full alert for Turkey's next move in the East Mediterranean, as Ankara issued a new NAVTEX on Monday for the continuation of survey activities of its Oruc Reis vessel until September 12th, 2020. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- September 1st, Greece is in talks with France and other countries over arms purchases to boost its Armed Forces, a Government official told Reuters on Tuesday, as tensions grow over energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Greek media reported on Monday that Athens had agreed to acquire 18 Dassault-made "RAFALE" fighter jets from France. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- September 3rd, NATO's Chief said Thursday that alliance members Greece and Turkey have agreed to start "technical talks" to help reduce the risks of military accidents in the eastern Mediterranean, where the two are locked in a tense stand-off over offshore energy rights. But an official in Athens quickly denied any such agreement, saying Turkey must first withdraw its ships from the area where it's carrying out drilling research. There was no immediate reaction from Ankara. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- September 4th, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Friday said that talks with Greece and Turkey on "establishing an enhanced deconflicting mechanism" in the Eastern Mediterranean are under way but have not reached an agreement. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Greek Armed Forces remain in high readiness due to Turkish activity in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea and renewal of NAVTEX until September 12th, 2020. 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 US and EU push both sides for reducing tension in the region and starting dialogue, while the NATO Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg leaked that Greece and Turkey have agreed to start talks. This announcement has frustrated Greek administration which rejected the agreement as long as the Turkish research vessels are sailing in Eastern Mediterranean. Eventually, NATO announced that a "diconflicting mechanism" is underway. Under current situation in Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea, Greece is forced to strengthen and modernize its Armed Forces operational capability. In this context, Greece is promoting an agreement with France for purchase of 18 "RAFALE" fighter jets (4th generation jets).



KOSOVO: September 4th, Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës - AAK) leader Ramush Haradinaj has announced that he does not support the agreement with Serbia formed in Washington DC due to a point relating to Lake Ujmani, adding

that the party will not cooperate in any Government in which Serbia becomes a party to Kosovo's resources. (www.prishtinainsight.com)

- September 5th, reactions to the agreement to normalize economic relations between Serbia and Kosovo varied as expected in Pristina with the authorities praising it and the opposition criticizing it. Aljbuljena Hadziu, from the Vetevendosje (Self-determination) party, said that the agreement which Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti signed is damaging and violates Kosovo's Constitution. However, Seljim Selimi, Kosovo's Justice Minister who was also part of the delegation in the negotiations with Belgrade, stated that a great success for Kosovo was achieved in Washington regarding the abolition of the visa regime with the United States. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 6th, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Avdulah Hoti, announced that he would meet with the Serbian representatives in Brussels on Monday and discuss the final agreement on mutual recognition and normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 6th, Turkey has urged Kosovo to refrain from opening an Embassy in Jerusalem, arguing that it undermines the historical and legal status of Jerusalem and the issue of Palestine and that it could jeopardize the process of other countries granting Kosovo recognition. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo has signed an agreement with Serbia under the US mediation in Washington aiming to normalize their economic relations. It is not clear yet what exactly have signed the two parts but

there are several "dark" points which need clarification. Taking into consideration domestic political reactions it is not still certain which will be the implications regarding internal politics. AAK leader, Ramush Haradinaj has threatened to withdraw from the ruling coalition due to the agreement. The Prime Minister, Avdullah Hoti has said that agreement will be finalized in Brussels including Kosovo's recognition. It is not certain that Serbia has agreed in such a scenario; it is rather a statement for "internal consumption" seeking to mitigate reactions. In any case, current agreement does not include Kosovo's recognition by Serbia and this is a major setback by Pristina's initial negotiation principles. Moreover, Kosovo has been engaged in the USA's pre-electoral rivalries and regional geopolitical games. Pristina's commitment of opening an embassy in Jerusalem may affect its relations with several Arab and Islamic countries. 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: September 1st, President Igor Dodon said he continues to believe that the current Parliament should be dissolved and snap parliamentary elections should be held as soon as possible. The largest part of the citizens want the same as the current legislative body no longer reflects the results of the elections of February 2019, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- September 2nd, the Iasi – Ungheni - Chisinau gas pipeline is an alternative for the supply of Moldova with gas and will be used only if its utilization will be reasonable from economic viewpoint,

Prime Minister Ion Chicu stated in the program “*Emphasis on Today*” on TVR Moldova channel, being quoted by IPN. (www.ipn.md)

- September 4th, the first concrete discussions on the agreement for the lending of 200 million Euro by Russia have been held this week. It is projected that the agreement will be negotiated and signed in November, President Igor Dodon stated in the program “*President Responds*,” being quoted by IPN. (www.ipn.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The question of dissolving has been raised by the President, Igor Dodon. It is true that current ruling coalition does not reflect citizens' will and the Government enjoys a fragile majority serving specific parties' interests. Moldovan society believes that corruption is reigning in current state's politics. With presidential elections ahead Dodon seeks to show to Moldovans that he is a President standing above political interests and games; he is a President of all Moldovans. Economic situation in the country is desperate and without foreign financial support and aid Moldova could collapse. In this context, the Government has started talks with IMF and WB for receiving loans. Moreover, the country is in talks with Russia for an extra loan of 200 million Euros. 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 31st,

according to the preliminary data provided by State Election Commission (SEC), on the basis of 100% of the votes counted, Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) won 35.06% of votes (30 seats), coalition “*For the future of Montenegro*” (Za Budućnost Crne Gore) won 32.55% (27 seats), coalition “*Peace is our nation*” (Mir je Naša Nacija) won 12.53% (10 seats) and coalition “*In Black and White*” (Crno na bijelo) won 5.53% (4 seats). Social Democrats of Montenegro (Socijaldemokrate Crne Gore – SD) won 4.10% (3 seats), Bosniak Party (Bošnjačka Stranka – BS) won 3.98% (3 seats), Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska Partija - SDP) won 3.14% (2 seats), Albanian List (Albanska Lista - AL) won 1.58% (1 seat), while Albanian Coalition (Albanska Koalicija - AK) won 1.14% (1 seat). Elections turnout reached 76.65%. (www.cdm.me)

- August 31st, leaders of three opposition coalitions [“*For the future of Montenegro*” (Za Budućnost Crne Gore), “*Peace is our nation*” (Mir je Naša Nacija), “*In Black and White*” (Crno na bijelo)] that won the slim majority of 41 out of

81 seats in the Montenegrin Parliament in Sunday's elections agreed to form an expert Government and continue to work on the country's EU integration process. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 1st, Milo Djukanovic, Montenegro's President, whose Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) lost the Sunday's election, conceded the defeat, telling Newsmax Adria on Tuesday that in his country and the Balkans two principles were established – pro-Western and the regressive and nationalist one which “has now aroused.” (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 2nd, budget deficit in the first seven months of this year reached 271 million Euros, or 5.9% of the GDP, data of the Ministry of Finance shows. Deficit has risen by 7.5%, due to epidemic situation. (www.cdm.me)

- September 6th, several tens of thousands of citizens have gathered in Podgorica on Sunday evening in a protest organized by “Montenegrin patriotic organizations” after pro-Serb opposition coalitions in the country took the majority in Parliament in last week's election. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Parliamentary elections of August 30th, 2020 in Montenegro have brought tectonic changes not only in domestic politics but in the regional ones as well. Opposition coalitions achieved to topple DPS and Milo Djukanovic after 30 years in power. Political formations with different views and approaches in state's politics were united under one goal; to oust DPS from power. Pro-Serbian and Pro-Russian DF achieved to become the 2nd

largest party in the country signaling a geopolitical challenge for Montenegro. The harsh rivalry between Milo Djukanovic and the Serbian Orthodox Church was the “Achilles' heel” for ruling DPS. Influence of the Church and Serbia was underestimated by Montenegrin authorities. Opposition announced that it will form an experts' Government seeking to reach consensus on different political views. However, a ruling coalition of a mixture of political formations sharing substantial political differences cannot be sustainable for a long time. The new Government is only signaling the transition from the 30 years power of Djukanovic to a new era but new elections is needed (in two or four years) to establish a new political reality in the country. Needless to say that the new ruling coalition will have to address political pressure from pro-western powers namely the EU, US and NATO. Serbia achieved to establish a strong axis starting from Belgrade to Podgorica and Banja Luka. 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. Montenegro – Serbia relations remain tense undermining good neighboring between the two countries and endangering stability of the region.



NORTH MACEDONIA: August 31st, with 62 votes for, the Parliament of North Macedonia elected last night the new Government of Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijalde-mokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) - Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI) led by Zoran Zaev. The session was attended by 115

MPs out of whom 113 MPs cast their vote. 51 MPs voted against the new Government's cabinet. (www.meta.mk)

- September 1st, the EU member states will discuss draft negotiating framework for North Macedonia on September 8th, 2020 in Brussels, which will be presented by the German presidency of the EU Council, new Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, Nikola Dimitrov told reporters. According to Dimitrov, the German EU presidency expects the first intergovernmental conference to take place in December 2020. (www.mia.mk)

- September 1st, new Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, Nikola Dimitrov and new Foreign Minister, Bujar Osmani told on Tuesday in a joint press conference that they do not expect neighboring Bulgaria to block North Macedonia's EU accession negotiations. (www.mia.mk)

- September 1st, the Police in North Macedonia arrested a terrorist group in the city of Kumanovo, the Internal Affairs Ministry said in a press release on Tuesday. The three young men aged 22 to 28 were reported to have been planning terrorist attacks. The press release said that they had all served jail sentences after returning from conflict zones in the Middle East for serving in foreign military organizations. The ministry said that one of the three men formed a terrorist cell modeled on the ideology of the Islamic State to launch terrorist attacks across North Macedonia. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 6th, reforms in the Defense Ministry will be according to the Armed Forces needs, Defense Minister Radmila Sekerinska said. According to her, transformation of the Army is only one of the reforms set to be implemented by the

Defense Ministry and in line with NATO standards. Sekerinska highlighted that positions in the Army will be reduced but none from military personnel will be laid off. (www.mia.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

North Macedonia has a new Government consisting of SDSM and DUI. Zoran Zaev continues as the Prime Minister seeking to accelerate the European prospect of the country after achieving in his first term to enter NATO as a full member state. According to Zaev, his Government will focus on economic growth, fight against corruption and establishment of rule of law. North Macedonia seeks to join the first intergovernmental conference on accession talks in coming December. Political developments in Montenegro may accelerate procedures in North Macedonia. Bulgaria has raised objections on North Macedonia's accession claiming bilateral dispute on linguistic issues but it is assessed that despite Bulgarian objections it will greenlight progress of the process.



ROMANIA: September 1st, National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal – PNL) Government led by the Prime Minister Ludovic Orban survived the no-confidence motion submitted by the opposition Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD). Only 226 MPs attended the Parliament's joint sitting for the vote on the motion, versus 233 needed for a quorum. (www.romania-insider.com)

- September 4th, Romania's Prime Minister Ludovic Orban announced at the beginning of the Government meeting on September 3rd that the executive would pass a decision to schedule the

general elections on December 6th, 2020. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

PSD censure motion failed due to lack of quorum in the Parliament. It is considered as PSD's failure since it failed to secure the necessary MPs (233) for the parliamentary session. Taking into consideration that five MPs of PSD did not attend the session it is a certain failure of its leader, Marcel Ciolacu who was appeared confident that the non-confidence motion would be successful. PNL Government survived and continues enjoying fragile majority in the Parliament. Elections will be held on December 6th, 2020 seeking to end a long period of political instability. 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: September 1st, a statement from Serbia's Embassy in Montenegro said on Tuesday Montenegro's citizens achieved a significant victory and showed how strong were close relations between the two countries, their common European future and cooperation. The state-

ment added Serbia did not interfere with the election process in Montenegro, "*respecting the state and the sovereign right of the citizens to decide freely and democratically.*" (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 1st, the Head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Irinej told the Nova.rs portal that he is glad to see the political changes in Montenegro. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 2nd, Aleksandar Vulin, Serbia's Defense Minister, visited the Ground Safety Zone (GSZ) base Doborsin in the south of the country along the administrative line with Kosovo. Vulin said that "*the Army of Serbia (VS) fulfilled its duties and wholly controlled the administrative line following the Military-Technical Agreement. VS in GSZ guarantees peace, safety and stability.*" (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 3rd, the Serbian Finance Ministry said on Thursday that the Moody's ratings agency kept the country's credit rating at the level of Ba3 with positive prospects. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 4th, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Kosovo Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti met with US President Donald Trump in the Oval Office, White House sources reported adding that an agreement to normalize economic relations was signed. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- September 6th, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic informed Russia's Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov during a phone conversation on Sunday about his meetings in Washington and Brussels, a press release by Vucic's office said, adding that the two agreed that Serbia and Russia have friendly relations and will "*continue working on the realization of all joint projects, as well as*

mutual support on the international political scene.” (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Several foreign policy challenges have emerged last week for Serbia. First of all, the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic signed in Washington an agreement with the Kosovo Prime Minister, Avdullah Hoti for normalization of economic relations between the two parts. It is still not clear what the agreement includes and how much beneficial or painful is for Belgrade. The fact is that Serbia signed an agreement avoiding a direct recognition of Kosovo independence. Of course dialogue and negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina have a lot of “chapters” ahead and none could predict the final outcome. It could be said that the US administration almost forced the two parts to sign the agreement – a useless agreement – aiming to show a foreign success of the Trump presidency. It is assessed that Kosovo will face more internal problems with the agreement than Serbia. Apart from Kosovo issue, Serbia is satisfied with political changes in Montenegro. Electoral victory of pro-Serbian (and pro-Russian) forces is a major success for Serbia which is establishing its influence in the little neighboring country. A pro-Serbian Government in Montenegro brings substantial political and geopolitical changes in the region and it would not be a surprise to watch the US administration to strengthen its presence in the Balkans (politically and militarily). It is expected also further upgrade of Serbian relations with Russia and China. The EU and US express through various channels their concern over Serbia’s democratic rule, media freedom and human rights. 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: September 1st, Prime Minister Janez Jansa held talks with his Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orban. They discussed “close all-around cooperation” between the two countries. The pair expressed strong support for the respective minorities on both sides of the border and called for stronger cooperation in a variety of bilateral projects. They also “highlighted the importance of strategic cooperation in the Central European area,” Jansa’s office said. (www.sta.si)

- September 4th, the parliamentary Defense Committee confirmed on Thursday evening a Government-sponsored bill on investment in the Slovenian Army for 2021-2027. The coalition MPs were inclined to the plan to modernize the Army, while the opposition, in particular the Left (Levica), opposed the plan to spend 780 million Euros for the military. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Janez Jansa’s Government enjoys relative stability. Slovenia – Croatia dispute regarding the Piran Bay is still active but without tension or escalation. Slovenia announced that it supports Croatian accession in the Schengen zone. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. Ac-

cording to the Armed Forces annual assessment the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities 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: September 1st, Turkey on Tuesday slammed the US' decision to partially lift the arms embargo on Greek Cypriots, saying that Ankara would take a countermeasure unless Washington reconsiders its decision. (www.aa.com.tr)

- September 3rd, a new anti-terrorism operation ("Lightning-9 Senyayla") has been launched in Turkey's eastern Mus, Bingol and southeastern Diyarbakir provinces, the Interior Ministry announced on Thursday. (www.dailysabah.com)

- September 4th, Turkey reiterated Friday its warning to France to end its provocative and colonialist stance in the Eastern Mediterranean, one of the main sources of tension in the region, according to Ankara. (www.dailysabah.com)

- September 5th, military forces of Turkey and the occupied North Cyprus launched an annual five-day military drill on Sunday showing Turkish determination to not back down on from guaranteeing the rights of the Turkish Cypriot community. (www.dailysabah.com)

- September 5th, allegations that tanks are being deployed to the Greek border by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) have proved baseless, Anadolu Agency (AA) reported late Saturday. According to information obtained by an AA correspondent, the transfer of the tanks was pre-


planned by Turkey's Second Army, based in the eastern province of Malatya. (www.aa.com.tr)

- September 6th, Turkey's research vessel "Oruc Reis" will continue with its purposeful mission in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Defense Ministry said on Sunday. On August 31st, despite opposition from Greece and other countries, Ankara again extended the duration of the "Oruc Reis" on Turkey's continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean through September 12th. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Turkey continues its research activity in Eastern Mediterranean maintain tension with Greece and Cyprus. It has extended its activity until September 12th, 2020 issuing a new NAVTEX. Simultaneously, it conducts military drills in Eastern Mediterranean as countermeasures in Greek Armed Forces presence in the region. The country appears determined to escalate tension threatening to exercise armed violence if its national strategic interests are violated. Under this circumstances it cannot be excluded a "hot" incident with Greece or Cyprus. 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 East-

ern Mediterranean, tension will remain active in the region; especially between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. Turkey appears frustrated with France due to its active role in Mediterranean Sea and Libya where it enjoys vital interests. Domestic security of Turkey is threatening constantly by Kurdish militants of PKK and that is why Turkish Armed Forces have inaugurated a new operation under the code name "Lightning-9 Senayla." 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.

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


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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.*