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# ***SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE***



***SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE***

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

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

### **“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE**

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**ALBANIA:** May 29<sup>th</sup>, the European Commission (EC) again recommended opening membership talks with Albania and North Macedonia on Wednesday, as announced by Commissioner for Enlargement Johannes Hahn during the presentation of the enlargement package to the European Parliament's Foreign Committee. *"Albania has moved reforms forward, especially a major transformation of the justice system, including an unprecedented reassessment process for judges and prosecutors,"* said Hahn. The European Commissioner stressed that *"both countries have moved ahead with reforms, particularly in the fields set by the Council in June 2018. In order to remain credible, the European Union must adhere to its commitments and respond clearly and positively when the countries meet their obligations,"* Hahn said. In the summary of the EC assessment sent to the EC and Albanian Parliament, it is noted that the country *"has continued to make good progress and has demonstrated its continued determination to advance with the European Union agenda."* Regarding to the deadlock the country is facing currently, the Commission states that *"opposition parties, most of which resigned their parliamentary mandates in February 2019, should engage constructively in democratic institutions and engage in a broad European consensus."* It also recommended that Albania should improve transparency and control over the financing of political parties. Concerning the electoral reform, no progress has been made to address and complement the OSCE/ODIHR electoral reform recommendations. It also mentioned, despite the mostly positive comments about the justice reform, that the Constitutional

Court should have nine members, but only one of them has remained due to resignations, retirements, and the vetting process. The EC report underlined that Police has stepped up operations against organized crime. However according to the Commission, the creation of a sustainable register of proactive investigations, prosecutions and punishments in the fight against corruption at all levels and organized crime remains a long-term challenge that continues to require further strengthened and sustained efforts by Albania, including operational cooperation with EU Member States. This is the third time the EC recommends to the European Parliament the opening of accession negotiations for Albania – last year, the EP parliament rejected the suggestion due to some member states, such as the Netherlands, not being convinced with Albania's progress in the fields of fighting organized crimes and corruption. Political experts have doubted whether all EP member states will unanimously agree to open accession negotiations with Albania this year as well, considering the tense situation the country finds itself in. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- May 31<sup>st</sup>, the Netherlands has officially filed a request for bringing back the visa regime to the people of Albania. In a letter sent to the Commissioner of Emigration and Foreign Affairs, Dimitris Avramopoulos, they ask the European Commission to take in consideration their request for banning all Albanian citizens from traveling visa-free to the Schengen area. The Dutch Parliament voted in favor of this proposition in April, and their argument was that there has been an increase of criminals from Albania into their country, although the official figures were

showing an insignificant number of Albanian suspects, and their own Foreign Minister insisted that such a measure would only complicate the relations with our country. (www.top-channel.com)

- June 2<sup>nd</sup>, opposition launched its seventh national rally against the Government. According to Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) more than 60,000 people joined protests. Protesters started with a march towards Prime Minister's headquarters throwing since the beginning smoke bombs and fireworks. Opposition has been holding protests since mid-February accusing Government's officials of corruption and electoral fraud in parliamentary elections two years ago. They demand a transitional Government and early elections. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Albania has entered in a period of political turmoil and fragile political stability not only because opposition organizes huge protests against the Government, but because opposition MPs decided to abandon Parliament and resign aiming at blocking Parliament's works. Such decision was strongly criticized by the international community namely the EU and U.S putting at risk the opening of accession negotiations in June 2019. Although EC Progress Report was positive, Albanian political crisis is getting deeper and deeper undermining Albania's EU future. It is doubtful if the EP will unanimously approve opening of accession negotiations. Failure of opening accession talks with the EU it will further destabilize the country toppling the Government. Local elections*

*scheduled for June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 is the milestone of rapid political developments in the country. The ruling socialists push by any mean to conduct the elections, while opposition declares that there will be no elections. Escalation of tension including violent incidents is highly expected as we approach to the election date. PD and LSI leaders, Basha and Kryemadhi respectively pushing for the Government's topple and snap elections. International community strongly supports Rama urging opposition to follow parliamentary procedures avoiding its unconventional practices. It is not normal for a stable country seeking to enter the European club to face such situation of political abnormality. Opposition MPs' resignation aiming at forcing the Government in collapse is not a reasonable political strategy for a functional and stable democracy. It is assessed that Rama is stabilizing situation eliminating possibilities for snap elections. The Government is accused of having links with organized crime and current situation raises questions over the power of "Albanian mafia" in the country and its influence in state's politics. Undoubtedly, corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state's problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a "mother nation." The state maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. In this context, the Albanian Prime Minister and his Government work on promoting*

*Kosovo interests in international community using any forum they have access.*



## **BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:**

May 28<sup>th</sup>, Bosnia's Parliament is completely blocked while parliamentarians keep receiving high salaries, and it is "killing the state," the leader of Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA) Bakir Izetbegovic said after scheduled sessions of both houses did not even take place on Tuesday. He complained that no parliamentary Commissions could be formed in both houses. The reason behind it, he said, was that the ruling Bosnian Serb party, the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrataor - SNSD) does not want any decisions to be made until a new Government is formed after the October 2018 election. The Government has not been formed yet mostly because of the bickering between the winning parties over the country's intention to join NATO - something Bosnian Serbs now vehemently oppose although the country submitted a request to join. Bosnia has previously pursued NATO membership but in recent years Bosnian Serb politicians have changed their mind. The next candidate for the Prime Minister comes from the SNSD which is strongly opposed to membership in the Alliance and the Bosniak (Muslim Bosnians) and Croat presidency members refuse to greenlight him, arguing that he would breach the law if he would not implement previous decisions. Izetbegovic said that this is not the first time this situation emerged due to the Council of Ministers not being formed, but that nobody ever blocked the work of the State Parliament. Izetbegovic said participants "spoke

*about the detail which everything got stuck on - the Annual National Programme (ANP)."* Submitting the ANP is part of the Membership Action Plan (MAP), an essential step for the country's path towards NATO membership. "A solution here can be found, as submitting the national plans does not imply Bosnia's membership in NATO, so we expect from the SNSD and their leader to make an effort and find a final solution together with us," he said. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- May 29<sup>th</sup>, talks on Bosnia's accession to the EU should be opened once it achieves the necessary degree of compliance with the membership and political criteria, the EU European Commissioner for Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, said presenting the European Commission's (EC) opinion on Bosnia's EU membership application. "*Bosnia and Herzegovina does not yet sufficiently fulfill the criteria related to the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, set by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993. In this respect, the country needs to dedicate considerable efforts to sufficiently fulfill such criteria,*" the Commission wrote in its opinion after receiving the answers their Questionnaire. Bosnia needs to bring its constitutional framework in line with European standards and ensure the functionality of its institutions in order to be able to take over EU obligations, the Commission wrote. The EC particularly stressed that the country needs to improve its electoral framework and the functioning of the judiciary, as well as the prevention and fight against corruption and

organized crime, including money-laundering and terrorism. As for the economic criteria, the Commission concluded that Bosnia has achieved a certain degree of macroeconomic stability. The country's track record in implementing its obligations under the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) needs to improve, they said, notably regarding the establishment of the parliamentary dimension of the Agreement and by adopting a national plan for the adoption of the EU acquis. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the illusion that Bosnia's Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (RS) entity belongs only to Serbs resulted in total discrimination of Bosniaks (Muslim Bosnians), Croats and others in it, through non-compliance and non-implementation of applicable Constitutional and legal norms, Bosnia's Prime Minister, Denis Zvizdic, wrote in a public statement, on Sunday. *"The unscrupulous, unconstitutional, unlawful, and discriminatory actions of the RS' authorities are best seen in the disrespect of Article 97 of the Constitution of Republika Srpska, according to which 'proportional representation in public institutions of the RS should correspond to the 1991 census until the complete implementation of Annex 7 of the Dayton Peace Agreement',"* Zvizdic, wrote. He argued that the 1991 census showed that Bosniaks accounted for 28% of the population on the territory which would later be known as the RS. According to him, the RS Interior Ministry would need an additional 23% of Bosniaks to fill its ranks properly. The Head of the Council of Ministers, which is a de facto Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, noted that the RS Interior Ministry now consists of over 93% Serb employees, which is 12% more Serbs

than there were in the 2013 census and over 30% more than in the 1991 census in Bosnia. *"With everything mentioned above, RS is forming a mono-national auxiliary Police unit which experts say is an embryo of anti-Constitutional, para-military forces,"* Zvizdic wrote. adding that this is the reason to *"wake up and consistently insist on the implementation of the rule of law and international legal standards."* Accordingly, he added, situation requires an urgent and clear position of the international community on the matter, and RS officials should *"stop observing situation in the country through bifocal glasses and respect rule of law,"* building the country as a society of peace, stability, justice, and equality. (www.ba.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*Political instability and uncertainty continues in Bosnia because it has not formed a Government since October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018 general elections. The three main parties representing the three constituent entities (Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats); HDZ (Bosnian Croatian party), SDA (Bosnian Muslim or Bosniak party), and SNSD (Bosnian Serbian party) have reached an agreement to cooperate in forming a Government. It seems that the three parties achieved to bypass their different views on main issues but still cannot overcome Bosnia's accession process towards NATO. Bosnian Serbs insist that the country should remain neutral staying out of NATO, Bosniaks remain committed to NATO accession as a precondition for supporting a Government, while Bosnian Croats appears neutral on the issue wishing to overcome the deadlock. Country faces several functional and institutional problems.*



*Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs destabilizing the state. Of course, both entities (Croats and Serbs) take in advantage "Dayton Peace Agreement" weaknesses and malfunctions. Russia pays special attention in Serbia and Bosnia in order to maintain its influence in the region. Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, and Montenegro have already entered NATO, while North Macedonia would join the Alliance within 2019. These two countries (Serbia and Bosnia) are the only "vehicles" for Russia to maintain a narrow influence in Southeastern Europe. Apart from external influence and intervention the country has to confront several internal "threats" which undermine its sovereignty, cohesion, and viability. The EC Progress Report on Bosnia is on the right base mentioning all institutional and functional problems the state faces. EU path is too far for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU. Election of ultra nationalist pro-Russian Serb Milorad Dodik in the tripartite Presidency is a strong sign of more nationalistic rhetoric and more obstacles towards Bosnia's EU and NATO (mostly) integration. Dodik is a person who does not actually believe in B&H viability and is expected to promote (actually, he has already started) his own political agenda. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests.*



**BULGARIA:** May 27<sup>th</sup>, the ruling Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria's (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) achieved to maintain over 5% by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP). Boyko Borisov's party won 30.77% of votes, and BSP 25.01%. Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi - DPS) is in the third place with 13.73%, and IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO – Bulgarsko Natsionalno Dvizhenie) got 8.06%. ([www.novinite.com](http://www.novinite.com))

- May 28<sup>th</sup>, Kornelia Ninova has resigned as leader of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP), taking full responsibility for the party's election results, Focus News Agency reported. Ninova announced her decision today, opening the meeting of the party's National Council. She said that a congress should be convened to launch a procedure for direct election of party leader. According to the BSP statute, in the case of early termination of office, the Chair's duties are performed by a Deputy Chairman appointed by a decision of the National Council. Kornelia Ninova was elected leader of the BSP on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016 with a four-year term of office. ([www.novinite.com](http://www.novinite.com))

- May 31<sup>st</sup>, the Bulgarian side will not make any compromises for the quality and equipment of the F-16s and the negotiations are only for the price. This was assured by Minister of Defense Krasimir Karakachanov, quoted by the Bulgarian National Radio. "When we chose the United States as a potential counterpart, the White House, and other factors in the US administration, we were



*confident that they would be in line with our financial capabilities. However, it turned out that this is a matter of negotiations and talks that will continue until we find the advantageous crossing point that is acceptable to both sides,” he said. Karakachanov also underlined that under no circumstances would it be at the expense of either the armament of the aircraft or its equipment. (www.novinite.com)*

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Ruling GERB strengthened its position by the European elections achieving to reconfirm citizens' trust. BSP failed to win and its leader resigned. Under these circumstances, the European elections may work positively for the Government stabilizing its position. The junior partner of the ruling coalition, United Patriots remains the vulnerable and unpredictable piece of the inter-governmental stability; none could predict when a new incident or dispute will break out. Thus, Bulgaria has entered in a period of rather stable political situation. The President Radev grabs every opportunity to criticize the Government (and the Prime Minister Borissov) highlighting his different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Opposition BSP tries to push further Borisov and his Government by strengthening its rhetoric and having tabled three motions of no confidence so far. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. However, the EC made clear that Bulgaria could not enter the Eurozone before 2022. Apart from that the European Parliament adopted a resolution for the accession of Bulgaria (and Romania) in Schengen*

*Zone. However, it is questioned if the European Council will receive a unanimous final decision for Bulgaria under the current migration pressure. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Although modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc) military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards. The latest report on defense situation confirmed the major problems the Bulgarian Armed Forces are facing. Security situation stable; no major threats.*



**CROATIA:** May 27<sup>th</sup>, the two major parties in Croatia, ruling centre-right Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica – HDZ) and the centre-left Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske - SDP) won four seats each out of 12 in the European Parliament (EP) election held on Sunday, the State Election Commission reported in the early hours of Monday morning. A total of 396 candidates on 33 slates vied for the 12 seats in the European Parliament allocated to Croatia. Of the 12 deputies elected, 11 will go to Brussels immediately after the election while the 12th will go after Great Britain leaves the EU, state agency Hina reported early on Monday. The result of 22.72% votes and four seats won marks a blow for the HDZ, which counted on at least five seats to match its result from 2014, but the SDP, which has seen a sharp decline in ratings in recent months due to internal divisions, scored a huge

success with 18.71% votes and four seats. This year, unlike in 2014, the HDZ decided to campaign alone instead of forming a coalition of centre-right and right wing parties. One seat was won by the right-wing Sovereignist coalition led by Ruza Tomasic, for whom this will be a third mandate as MEP after 2013 and 2014. The first two times, she entered the EP on the HDZ slate. The SDP campaigned alone as well, but unlike the HDZ, did not lose seats: in 2014, the SDP-led coalition had won four seats in the EP, the same number the party won on its own in 2019. The voter turnout in Croatia was, at 29.6%, somewhat higher than in 2014 when only 25.2% voters cast their ballots, but still well below the EU-level turnout which stood at more than 50%, the highest since 1979. In 2014, voter turnout across the EU stood at some 42%. ([www.hr.n1info.com](http://www.hr.n1info.com))

- May 27<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and Minister of Defense Damir Krsticevic marked Armed Forces Day and the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Croatian military at the Ministry of Defense. The two men participated in ceremonies to name a Croatian Army Square and National Guard Corps Avenue within the complex of the Ministry of Defense and General Staff. They also opened an exhibit of the Croatian defense industry and presented commendations and promotions. *“Today the military is prepared to conduct all tasks it has been given through the constitution and laws, defending territorial integrity as well as participating in missions and operations. At this moment we are present throughout the world in various missions and operations, and naturally the Croatian military will always assist its people in those situations when needed,”* said Chief of General Staff,

General Mirko Sundov. *“This year in October the military will return to Pula, a center will also be formed for unmanned aircraft systems, and third, a very key thing, is the cyberspace command. This means that the Croatian military, for the first time, will receive a command for cyberspace or development of capabilities in cyberspace, from defense which is strategically important for the Croatian military. We are fully focused on that this year,”* said Minister of Defence Damir Krsticevic. Asked by reporters if one of this year’s priorities should be the acquisition of combat aircraft, Krsticevic said that the Ministry of Defense is in the phase of preparing a second attempt at acquisition, adding that what is important is that the Government has decided to resolve this strategic issue. ([www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr](http://www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr))

- May 31<sup>st</sup>, the topic of today's debate in Croatian Parliament was the oil and oil derivatives market, as well as the obligation to keep reserves. Parliament should adopt new European directives that ease the keeping of mandatory oil and oil derivative reserves. The opposition however was concerned over the possibility of reserves being kept in other countries. Anka Mrak Taritas from the GLAS party said that oil reserves should be kept on our own territory, while Ivan Lovrinovic from the Change Croatia party said that *“The possibility to keep strategic reserves abroad without any kind of contract is simply scandalous.”* State secretary Ivo Milatic recalled that we already had contracts with Germany and Hungary. Opposition took the opportunity to bring up other energy issues while criticizing the Government for the MOL oil company's closure of the Sisak oil refinery. They accused the

Government of not having a strategy, while some called for early elections. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Croatia follows a tough regional policy with neighboring countries. It is openly intervene in Bosnia's internal affairs, while it maintains open disputes with Slovenia, Serbia, and Bosnia. One should take into consideration that Croatia shows its military strength and capabilities quite often not only in international, but also in national level sending strong messages to neighboring countries. Apart from that, Croatia pays special attention in energy strategy and security announcing ambitious projects. The state enjoys political stability, while its economy is growing. Border dispute on Piran Bay remains active and Slovenia's initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone, while the EC sends good news regarding Croatia's fiscal policy. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.*



**CYPRUS:** May 27<sup>th</sup>, ruling

Democratic Rally (Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός - DISY) came out on top in Sunday's European elections, with opposition Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού - AKEL) trailing some 1%

behind at 28% with 100% of the vote counted. Center-right Democratic Party (Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα - DIKO) came in third with 14%, Movement for Social Democracy (Κίνημα Σοσιαλδημοκρατών - EDEK) with 11%, far-right National Popular Front, (Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο - ELAM) with 8%, Democratic Alignment (Δημοκρατική Παράταξη -DIPA) at 4% and the Greens-Citizens Alliance (Πράσινοι – Συμμαχία Πολιτών) with 3%. The Yiasemi (Jasmine) party of Turkish Cypriot Afrika publisher Sener Levent received 2% of the vote, all from the Famagusta district. ELAM's share of the vote in Paphos reached 12% and as high as 16% in the Famagusta district. DISY leader Averof Neophytou, speaking at the party headquarters after meeting with President Nikos Anastasiades as the count came to a close, said the election resulted were a validation of the ruling party's policies by the electorate ensuring the party remained the main political force on the island. It will get to keep two seats in the European Parliament (EP). Neophytou also expressed concern over the rise of the nationalist party. "We recognize that society has sent a message not only to the Government side, but overall to the political system," he said. "The rise of the nationalist party, even if it has not elected an MEP, can only be a worry. You have to listen to society and to address the cause of the 'birth' of this phenomenon. As the Democratic Rally we will analyze seriously the election results and where required we will proceed with any changes needed," he concluded. A similar concern was expressed by Akel leader Andros Kyprianou who said everyone needed to take responsibility for the phenomenon of the rise of nationalism. He specifically named ELAM and said it was

concerning. The left-wing party ran Turkish Cypriot academic Niyazi Kizilyurek on their ballot. Kyprianou said the party would continue to work with the Turkish Cypriots. Turnout overall was 42.8% Kyprianou told reporters, compared with 43.97% in the European elections in 2014. Hundreds of Turkish Cypriots had voted by midday, most of them crossing from the nine checkpoints along the buffer zone with their families. The biggest turnout was at the special election centre set up near Ledra Palace. Anastasiades, Interior Minister Constantinos Petrides and Head of the European Commission Delegation in Cyprus Andreas Kettis, visited the same special polling station. A total of 81,611 Turkish Cypriots were registered to vote. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 31<sup>st</sup>, UNFICYP on Friday said the peacekeeping force was dealing with heightened tensions in Denia after agricultural machinery entered from the north side of the buffer zone and began harvesting a wheat crop sowed by Greek Cypriot farmers on Thursday. At the same time, the Foreign Ministry said on Friday it was lodging representations with UNFICYP over the incident. *"We are liaising with both sides to address the raised tensions in the area,"* UN spokesman Aleem Siddique said on Friday. *"Maintaining the status quo in the area is our most important priority."* According to media reports Turks, believed to be settlers, accompanied by unarmed Turkish armed forces began harvesting their crops. TV footage on Sigmalive showed a Greek Cypriot farmer standing close to a moving harvester shouting *"thieves, thieves"* as it continued to mow down the wheat crop. Denia community leader Christakis Panayiotou said the

Turkish forces that had accompanied the harvester were not armed, but others further back, around 50 or 60 meters away, were. He said the people attempting to harvest the crops were likely to be settlers as the neighboring villages of the area, Avlona and Filia, are mostly inhabited by Turkish settlers. He said the Greek Cypriots living in the area do not have a problem with Turkish Cypriots. So far, on Friday all was quiet, he told news channels. However, Panayiotou believes more has to be done to solve the situation. *"Foreign Ministry must inform Europe,"* he said. *"Such small problems can escalate into big ones."* One farmer told media *"I cannot describe the feeling when you see the Turks reap your crop."* The Foreign Ministry in a statement said it was lodging representations with the UN peacekeeping force and has been following developments closely from the first moment. Government spokesman Prodromos Prodromou also commented, saying the Government was in close contact with UNFICYP. *"We need to remain calm in the face of such provocations,"* he said, adding that the government was watching and monitoring the situation. This was not the first time there have been issues in Denia. Similar incidents were reported last November. At the time it was suggested but not confirmed that the Greek Cypriot farmers did not have permits and had begun cultivating too close to the Turkish ceasefire line, for which permits are not granted. Denia was a mixed village prior to the inter-communal troubles in the 1960s. In 1974 Greek Cypriots fled the village, while Turkish Cypriots were relocated north with the former returning to the area after hostilities ceased. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- May 31<sup>st</sup>, The Foreign Ministry on Friday briefed EU Ambassadors in Cyprus on the state of play vis-à-vis Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the background to the recent Turkish activity off the west coast of the island. Last month, Ankara positioned its drillship Fatih, some 40 nautical miles off Paphos claiming the area "lies entirely within Turkish continental shelf notified to the UN." Since then the EU has on three occasions condemned Ankara's actions. In its progress report on Turkey released Wednesday, the European Commission (EC) recalled the European Council's statement of March 2018 strongly condemning Turkey's continued illegal actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea. It also recalled Turkey's obligation to respect international law and good neighborly relations and called on Turkey to respect the sovereign rights of Cyprus to explore and exploit its natural resources in accordance with EU and International Law. In March 2019, it said, the EU called on Turkey to refrain from any such illegal acts, to which it would respond appropriately and in full solidarity with Cyprus. Many questions arose however as to the legal status of the area where the Fatih was positioned given that it is not an area containing any blocks licensed by Cyprus, and also the fact that the island does not have a delimitation agreement with Ankara, questions which the Foreign Ministry was seeking to clarify for the Ambassadors given the complicated international legalities. The issue caused a furore recently when British Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan appeared to question Cyprus' sovereignty over its EEZ. ([www.cyprus-mail.com](http://www.cyprus-mail.com))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Cyprus faces an ongoing crisis with the Turkish drillship Fatih invading within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) ready to start oil and gas drills 50 nm west of Pafos. Direct violation of its sovereign rights which aim at establishing "fait accompli" in a maritime area Turkey claims it enjoys full rights to exploit, is a serious evolving situation which should be resolved in terms of crisis management under pressure conditions. It looks like Cyprus (and Greece) did not have a well-prepared resolution plan for such situation although it was an expected and predicted Turkish reaction. Diplomatic support of the US and EU through statements is not enough to deter Turkey from its operational plans. Cyprus should push the EU for specific sanctions against Turkey as a direct measure of pressure. What Cyprus really needs at the moment is the presence of aeronautical forces to protect its interests and sovereignty and this lack of military force is a major gap for exercising its sovereign rights. Turkish announcement for a second drillship which will be sent within Cypriot EEZ escalates further current situation. Apart from that, border incident in Denia occupied region shows that the Turkish side strengthens its provocations. To conclude, Cyprus should stop immediately this situation which threatens its national sovereignty. Escalation of tension including armed violence could not be excluded. In an important and decisive step, Cyprus filed officially to the UN the coordinates for the northern (not delimited) part of its EEZ, something it had not done previously demolishing Turkey's argument that it is a disputed (grey) area. UK differentiated its stance compared to the US and EU speaking*

about “a disputed area” provoking Cyprus harsh reaction. Despite current situation, Cyprus works systematically in order to become a major part of the East Mediterranean energy hub. It is favored not only by its natural gas deposits, but also by its strategic position in the “heart” of East Mediterranean Sea and of course of being an EU member state. The strategy of multilateral cooperation seems to be fruitful. At the moment, Cyprus is engaged in three different trilateral formations which also include strong features of strategic cooperation and alliance; Cyprus – Egypt – Greece, Cyprus – Israel – Greece, and Cyprus – Jordan – Greece. The last two are highly improved due to the US engagement. At the moment Cyprus is promoting a fourth model of cooperation between Cyprus, Greece, and Lebanon. In other words, Cyprus is becoming the “leading link” between the Middle East and the Arab world on the one hand and the EU on the other. Cyprus seeks to negotiate and reach agreements with its neighboring countries regarding their EEZ expanding maritime cooperation and energy security. Turkey looks like being isolated from the energy game and its current aggressive reaction is attributed to this situation. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Cyprus improved its bilateral relations with the US, strengthened its defense cooperation with France, UK, and lately develops its defense and security relations with Germany. One could say that Cyprus strengthens defense cooperation with NATO leading countries. The US administration promotes abolishment of the arms embargo against Cyprus allowing it to improve its military capabilities. Conduct of aeronautical exercises in cooperation

with other countries (Israel, Egypt etc) sends various messages of defense capability, readiness, and determination. Although the UN Secretary General appears optimistic for a new round of talks between the two communities, it is assessed that talks could not be resumed with vessels violating Cypriot sovereignty. President Anastasiades promotes the scenario of a “bizonal, bicomunal decentralized federation”; an idea which is in principle accepted by the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community and enjoys support from the U.S. However, there are a lot of disputed issues in which both parts should compromise; the most important is considered the decision-making process. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



**GREECE:** May 27<sup>th</sup>, the comfortable lead (9.35%) secured by New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) over ruling Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) in the European Elections in Greece on Sunday pointed to a clear shift in the political direction selected by voters in the country. The gap between ND and SYRIZA is the widest ever recorded between the first two contenders in the nine European Elections held in the country since 1981. ND garnered 33.11% (which corresponds to 8 seats in the European Parliament), SYRIZA had 23.76% (6 seats), centre-left Movement for Change (Κίνημα Αλλαγής - KINAL) had 7.72 percent (2 seats), the Communist Party of Greece (Κομμουνιστικό

Κόμμα Ελλάδας – KKE) had 5.35% (2 seats), neo-Nazi Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή – ΧΑ) had 4.88% (2 seats), pro-Russian right-wing party Greek Solution (Ελληνική Λύση) with 4.18% (1 seat). Furthermore, the clear lead consolidated by candidates supported by ND in the country's largest municipalities of Athens and Thessaloniki, as well as in the equivalent regional units of Attica and Central Macedonia in the first round of local elections, further pointed to the crushing defeat of the governing party. Following the losses in the ballot box, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras announced late Sunday night he will call early elections after the second round of local and regional elections next weekend. Snap elections in Greece may take place on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019 instead of June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 as a result of nationwide university entrance exams, which will be running from June 6<sup>th</sup> to July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- May 31<sup>st</sup>, the Greek President, Prokopis Pavlopoulos has decided not to sign off the presidential decree on the appointment of the new Prosecutor and President of the Supreme Court until June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 when the term of the current leadership expires, sources said on Friday. During an almost three-hour meeting, the cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, selected Dimitra Kokotini as its top Prosecutor and Irini Kalou as its President. Both are currently Vice-Presidents of the Court. Pavlopoulos is expected to receive the presidential decree, signed by the cabinet, by Monday. The Government has been severely criticized by the political opposition over its decision to complete the appointments, questioning the legitimacy of the process. *“Despite the opposition's timely warning that the*

*outgoing Government lacks the legitimacy to make any major decisions apart from those on current affairs ahead of the elections ...it proceeded today with the unconstitutional selection of a new President and Prosecutor for the Supreme Court,”* New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) said in a press release. *“It is an institutionally unprecedented decision, which also involves the President of the Republic, as he will be called to decide whether to ratify an institutionally illegal and unconstitutional action,”* it said, adding it was sure the President will act in line with his duties. (www.ekathimerini.gr)

- June 2<sup>nd</sup>, Greeks went to the polls on Sunday for a second round of local and regional authority elections for seven regions and 217 municipalities, with conservative New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) hoping to build on its significant victory in European Parliament polls a week ago ahead of a snap general election next month. Once again polling stations across the country opened at 7 a.m. and closed at 7 p.m., with the first predictions based on official results expected at around 9 p.m. The most closely watched races will be for Athens Mayor, where ND-backed Costas Bakoyannis is up against leftist Coalition of Radical Left's (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) Nasos Iliopoulos, and Attica regional Governor, where leftist incumbent Rena Dourou is being challenged by ND's Giorgos Patoulis. Other key races include that for Greece's main port of Piraeus, where incumbent Yiannis Moralis will go up against ND-backed Nikos Vlachakos, and for the northern port of Thessaloniki, where ND's Nikos Tachiaos is competing against



Constantinos Zervas. Speaking during a trip to Corinth in the Peloponnese, where ND aims to expand its influence, conservative leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis described Sunday's local and regional authority runoffs as "*the second big step for political change*," adding that "*the definitive and final one will happen on July 7.*" The leftist Government, for its part, is hoping to recoup some of the losses it suffered in the European election, which saw it lose to ND by more than 9%. It is believed to have lined up a series of legislative amendments to push through Parliament next week, including public sector appointments. The amendments will likely be tacked on to bills foreseeing changes to town planning or legislation overhauling the Greek penal code. (www.ekathimerini.gr)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Snap parliamentary elections will be called for July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019 after ruling SYRIZA was strongly defeated in the European and local elections by opposition conservatives ND. The country has entered into a long pre-electoral period due to European and local election and the coming parliamentary one. ND will focus to achieve a full majority in the coming elections in order to form a stable Government. A major dispute has broken out due to the fact that the Government tried to appoint new heads in judiciary; an action which was interpreted by opposition as an effort to control justice. On the other hand it is a period that Greece faces diplomatic and security challenges mainly by Turkey. Internal terrorism is considered as a major unresolved problem of national security undermining stability of the state. Greek – Turkish relations are deteriorating*

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



**KOSOVO:** May 31<sup>st</sup>, President Hashim Thaci said he would consider a referendum on a union with Albania if the EU continues to isolate Kosovo. Thaci told RTV

Dujajini that the EU's actions towards Kosovo show that the time has come to consider serious institutional steps towards national unity, adding that the idea of correcting what he called a historic injustice by annexing the southern Serbia municipalities of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja has never been more sensitive. "We can do this through a resolution in the Parliaments or in a referendum in Kosovo and Albania, including Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac," he said. Thaci said the Western Balkans summit in Berlin had not shut down any idea or launched new ones. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- June 1<sup>st</sup>, Russia's Foreign Ministry has threatened Kosovo of consequences for "disrespecting the United Nations," after the Kosovo Police arrested a Russian national working for the UN. According to Belgrade-based news agency FoNet, Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement warning Pristina that such a precedent would have far-reaching consequences. Russia says that they will continue taking all necessary measures to protect their national, Mihail Krasnoschekov, who is staffer of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). He was arrested shortly and released during a Kosovo Police operation in Serb-inhabited northern part of the country. Police said the Russian UN staff has obstructed their work by using an official vehicle of UN as a barricade to stop Police vehicles from passing. Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj announced Friday that the Russian national has been declared "persona non grata" and called him a "spy camouflaged as UN staffer." (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- June 1<sup>st</sup>, Kosovo Police issued a press release revealing new details of a wide operation in northern Kosovo which resulted in arresting of 19 of their Officers, and dozens of civilians suspected of smuggling with goods and organized crime. *"The goal of this operation was to combat corruption and organized crime, raid and arrest several Police Officers, and on the day of the execution of the operation 19 Police Officers were arrested as suspects, 10 citizens' were suspects, 9 other civilians who obstructed Police Officers in performing their duties as well as 1 UNMIK official. As a continuation of the investigations related to this case until now another three Police Officers have been arrested who were listed in this in arrest warrant,"* the Police said in a statement adding that the operation was preceded by a several months investigation, with a grounded suspicion of involvement of several Police Officers and citizens in the offenses. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

*Kosovo keeps escalating tension with Serbia blocking any chance of dialogue restart. It conducted last week a Police operation in the north arresting Serbs (and Albanians). Taking into consideration the 100% tax on Serbian and Bosnian products, Kosovo Assembly resolution that Serbs committed genocide during 1998-1999 war, establishment of Kosovo Army, request for a special Court for Serbs it is hard to believe that Kosovo seeks dialogue and negotiations with Serbia. On the contrary, Pristina does not hesitate to escalate tension even with an armed conflict. Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci stated that his state could unified with Albania including parts of*

*south Serbia (Presevo, Bujanovac and Medveja). Such statements are not only immature, but also put under risk peace and stability in the region. Thaci openly speaks for border change and more specific violent change. It is strongly recommended that international community, namely the UN, EU and US should terminate decisively such irresponsible ideas. Under these circumstances it is rather difficult to see tangible results in next meeting scheduled for July 2019 in Paris. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. Kosovo seeks its Army to be operating all over the country pushing NATO towards such direction. The presence of Kosovo Army in the north it is assessed of high security risk which may lead in armed violence. One should take into consideration that the Serb President has already ordered all defense and security stakeholders to take all necessary measures for protecting Serbian population in Kosovo.*



**MOLDOVA:** May 29<sup>th</sup>,

Transnistria's leader, Vadim Krasnoselsky, said the Moldovan breakaway region will sue the Chisinau authorities for alleged crimes committed in the Dniester War in 1992, but did not say which Court he intends to address. Krasnoselsky told foreign diplomats that the breakaway region wants to launch an international lawsuit over "*the aggression against the people of Transnistria.*"

He said that Transnistria will ask for compensation. Krasnoselsky argued that during the Dniester armed conflict between separatists and Government forces in 1992, the Moldovan army committed "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity." He cited the case of the so-called "Ilascu Group" four Moldovan soldiers who have been detained in Transnistrian prisons for many years. "Those who shot Nikolay Ostapenko [a Transnistrian clerk] received state awards from Moldova. They were elected in absentia to the Parliaments of Moldova and Romania," said Krasnoselky. However Krasnoselsky did not say which international Court Transnistria intends to address with its claim. He also announced at the meeting with the foreign diplomats that he has asked Moldovan President Igor Dodon to offer a legal and political appreciation of the 1992 armed conflict, which he said would be a step towards in "*normalizing Moldovan-Transnistrian relations.*" Dodon has not responded so far. Official data says that during the war, about 280 people died and 300 seriously wounded, but experts believe that the conflict left more than 1,000 dead and over 1,500 wounded. The Dniester War took place from March to July 1992 and became a 'frozen conflict' after Moldova and the Russian Federation signed a convention on the principles of peaceful settlement of the armed conflict on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1992. ([www.balkaninsight.com](http://www.balkaninsight.com))

- May 31<sup>st</sup>, high-ranked representatives of Russia, the US and EU will come to Chisinau next week. On Wednesday, following his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Nur-Sultan city (Kazakhstan), President Igor Dodon stated that at the beginning of the next week, Chisinau

will be visited by Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak, the President Vladimir Putin's Special Representative for the development of trade and economic relations with the Republic of Moldova. European Neighborhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn would arrive in Chisinau on Monday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019. According to a preliminary visit program, Johannes Hahn will hold meetings with the Moldovan Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, and will converse with leaders of Moldova's main political forces. Also, next week Moldova will be visited by Bradley A. Freden, Director of the Eastern European Affairs Office at the US Department of State, responsible for relations with Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, whose visit program will be announced later on. Moldovan experts believe the anticipated visits are related to the current hard process of the formation of a parliamentary majority and approval of a new Government. (www.infotag.md)

(www.infotag.md)

- May 31<sup>st</sup>, the Permanent Bureau of the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM) has decided to entrust to the PDM leadership to invite the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) to negotiate on forming a parliamentary majority coalition and to approve a new Government of Moldova. PDM Press Secretary Vitalie Gamurari said at the press briefing on Friday that Moldova badly needs to overcome the current political crisis and ensure its political stability, which can only be achieved through forming a parliamentary majority that

will be able to form a new Government. In his words, PSRM proposals on forming a governing majority are realistic particularly in the case of social questions, resolution of which would protect low-income citizens. Among “quite realistic” he mentioned also the Socialists' demand to appoint PSRM Chairperson Zinaida Greceanii as Parliament Speaker. (www.infotag.md)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*Political deadlock continues in Moldova after parties failed to form a ruling majority so far. It seems that PSRM and ACUM block failed to reach an agreement leaving “free space” for a PSRM and PDM approach and agreement. The fourth parliamentary party – SOR - also co-included last week in a possible majority agreement between PSRM and PDM. It is assessed that the three parties will form a Government next two weeks before the President Igor Dodon to dissolve Parliament and call for early parliamentary elections. Massive visits of Russian, US, and EU officials in Chisinau next week are related to Government formation and backstage talks and deals. Political instability and uncertainty affect vitally in state's function blocking reforms, harming economy and keeping the country far from European standards. Pro-European ACUM assessing that a Government formation is ongoing decided to move in a more activist reaction by organizing protests; an action which definitely polarizes political atmosphere. Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. Political situation in the country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy*

*towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which will strengthen state's transparency, accountability, and democratic values. The current Government has walked into dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime and deep and determined justice reforms are needed. The US, EU and IMF express their major concerns. The ongoing crisis between Russia and Ukraine may affect Moldova; First of all Russia maintains military forces in Transnistrian ground and secondly it shares common borders with Ukraine which cannot go unnoticed by international stakeholders. The "Transnistria case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.*



**MONTENEGRO:** May 28<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Dusko Markovic said in the Parliament today that Montenegro will not break diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation after the verdict in the attempted terrorist action on the 2016 election day case, but will patiently and reasonably strive to raise relations to a higher level. Prime Minister answered the question made by the Democratic Front (Demokratski Front - DF) representative Nebojsa Medojevic on whether the Government will do so after the High Court in Podgorica pronounced verdicts against two citizens of the Russian Federation for attempted assassination of the then Prime Minister. *"No one said that Russian state institutions participated in the attempted murder of the then Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic,"* Markovic answered. (www.rtcg.me)

- May 30<sup>th</sup>, the European Commission (EC) released its annual Progress Report on

Montenegro process towards EU integration noting good and moderate progress in specific chapters. However, in the area of corruption and organized crime, it remained limited. Montenegro did not progress in the field of freedom of expression last year, has made limited progress in the fight against corruption that prevails in many areas, while only a certain amount of progress has been achieved in the fight against organized crime. EC focused on the problem of political shifts in the Council of the Radio and Television of Montenegro (RTCG) and the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, lack of confidence in the work of KAS, and the problem of smuggling through the Port of Bar. The EC noted that the goal of reducing the budget deficit was not achieved, as the public debt reached a new record mainly due to the loan for the construction of the highway. According to the EC Report, political situation in Montenegro is polarized and opposition is divided. It is also noted that confidence in the elections is at a low level, but also local elections were held in a peaceful atmosphere. The President, Milo Djukanovic said that Montenegro is on the right path and Report will be analyzed in detail. (www.vijesti.me)

- June 1<sup>st</sup>, Prime Minister Dusko Markovic did not invite the opposition to form a transitional Government, but to start a dialogue, said the President of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic. He noted that some media interpreted Markovic's statement given in the Parliament insufficiently precise. *"Prime Minister Markovic and myself used to call for a dialogue during the crises in the functioning of institutions,"* said the President adding that Markovic is calling on a dialogue with opposition. *"I listened to Prime Minister*



Markovic very carefully and he did not invite opposition to a transitional Government,” noted Djukanovic answering questions of journalists from Budva. (www.cdm.me)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although EC Progress Report is assessed as a positive one, it raises specific concerns over media freedom, corruption and organized crime. Report is elaborating on specific cases signaling detailed research. Montenegro enters in a crucial crossroad regarding its EU future and specific reforms and actions should be implemented if it remains committed in its goal to access the EU in 2025. In an effort to de-escalate political tension in the country Prime Minister Dusko Markovic has called opposition to dialogue but it is doubtful if it will succeed. Protests against the President and high officials disturbed a period of “euphoria”, emerging state’s problems such as corruption, link between state’s politics and organized crime, money laundering, media freedom, and nepotism. Protest movement and opposition parties reached an agreement to join forces for toppling the Government ensuring fair and free elections. Court verdict on DF members, Serbian and Russian citizens engaged in 2016 attempt coup continues to raise concerns over internal stability and relations with Serbia and Russia. The EP has already stated that Montenegro under certain conditions may be able to access the EU by 2025. It is assessed that the EU and U.S strongly supports the President Djukanovic and the Montenegrin Government despite corruption accusations as being the only loyal partner committed to the Western orientation of the state. In other words the west is

closing its eyes in lack of democratic values and rule of law due to geopolitical interests namely Russian influence. The Government promotes state’s political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment; It is estimated that the state needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Montenegro shows activity within NATO trying to prove that it is an equal partner of the alliance with military capacity according to NATO standards. Moreover, it tries to modernize and strengthen its operational capabilities and in this context it raised its defense budget aiming at purchasing new assets such as armored vehicles.



**NORTH MACEDONIA:** May 29<sup>th</sup>, the European Commission (EC) has published today the annual enlargement package, which sets out the progress made by the countries aspiring EU membership. The European Enlargement Commissioner, Johannes Hahn said that the European Commission recommends the opening of accession talks for Albania and North Macedonia, while demanding these two countries to pursue with their efforts to strengthen rule of law. “With good news for Albania and North Macedonia. EU Commission repeats its recommendations of last year to open now accession negotiations with both countries! Both countries have delivered. To remain credible with the merit based process, the EU must stick now to its commitment and respond clearly and positively when countries fulfill theirs!” Hahn posted on

social media. The European Commission's report about North Macedonia's advancement for 2019 is the most positive to date with positive words about the reforms, but there were comments about areas where more work is needed. Stressing that North Macedonia has continued to maintain a steady pace of implementation of EU reforms and the strengthening of democracy and the rule of law, it also states that fundamental changes were conducted in an inclusive and open political atmosphere. (www.meta.mk, www.nezavisen.mk)

- May 30<sup>th</sup>, for more than a month, around 2,700 troops from six countries will participate in the largest and most complex military exercise ever to be held in North Macedonia. Around 1,300 North Macedonia and US soldiers, as well as troops from Albania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Montenegro will take part in the “*Decisive Strike*” exercise at the Krivolak training area from June 5<sup>th</sup> to July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019. This is so far the largest and most complex military exercise, hosted by the country. At the exercise, troops from six countries will have to carry out joint operations of joint ground and air forces, combined operations of conventional troops, special forces, and combat operations in urban terrain. During the “*Decisive Strike*” exercise, a component of conventional forces with two Battalions of mechanized infantry from the country's Armed Forces, two Battalions from the 56<sup>th</sup> Stryker Brigade of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, equipped with armored fighting vehicles, an artillery Battalion with forces from Lithuania and Montenegro and North Macedonian and American helicopters will participate. The Special Operations Combat Team will include teams from the state's Special Forces, the “*Green Berets*” from the 19<sup>th</sup> Special Force

Group of the US National Guard and Special Forces teams from Albania and Bulgaria. For shooting, they will use “*plain*,” conventional ammunition, but not with depleted uranium. The “*Decisive Strike*” exercise is organized in partnership with the US Army and is part of the EUCOM team of exercises “*Saber Guardian 19*” in the Black Sea and the Balkan region. (www.meta.mk)



Emblem of the “Decisive Strike – 2019” exercise  
(Photo source: www.arm.mil.mk)

- May 31<sup>st</sup>, Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (*Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija* – SDSM) and Democratic Union for Integration (*Demokratska Unija za Integracija* - DUI), which make up the governing coalition in North Macedonia, are holding talks to reconstitute the governing cabinet and according to Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, the first changes are expected to be seen by mid June. “*I am talking to people who are suitable for the positions that will be vacated*,” Zaev said. According to him, relations with coalition party DUI are stable. Vice chairman of DUI, Izet Mexhiti has also confirmed that the coalition partners have managed to agree on the new cabinet, which will be known as Zaev 2<sup>nd</sup> Government. (www.nezavisen.mk)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :



*Implementing his decision for an extensive governmental reshuffle including not only Ministers and Deputy Ministers, but also top officials in state's institutions, the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev proceeded in dismissal of all municipal heads of SDSM. Election of SDSM's candidate, Stevo Pendarovski in the presidential post has facilitated Government's work improving state's functionality. The new President has already decreed 18 laws that his predecessor, Gjorge Ivanov refused to sign during his term. VMRO-DPMNE declares that is the most powerful political force in the country insisting for early parliamentary elections. It is assessed that the EU will offer its support to Zaev by opening accession negotiations in coming summer (June – July 2019) strengthening his political power in the country. In a different case, VMRO-DPMNE will push further for snap elections and ruling SDSM will be in a very difficult situation. In other words, the country's political stability is in the EU hands. EC Progress Report was positive as it was expected, although it has remarks for reforms in order the country to be ready for negotiations talks. Enjoying the NATO accession process and opening of accession negotiations with the EU, Zaev will strengthen his position feeling more comfortable to call for early elections. Ratification of NATO accession protocol by the member states proceeds rapidly. Although, there is concern for Turkey's ratification due to the fact that it tried to connect the North Macedonia accession process to NATO with its demands over FETO persecution, the Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister assured that his country will ratify the protocol soon. Moreover, it seems that Turkey does not welcome the strengthening of North Macedonia – Greece*

*relations; one should note that Greece has taken over North Macedonia's airspace protection in the context of NATO. The country should focus on its economy and major administrative and judicial reforms, fight against corruption and impunity aiming at reaching the EU standards.*



**ROMANIA:** May 27<sup>th</sup>, the pro-European opposition scored a massive victory over the ruling coalition in Romania in the elections for the European Parliament on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The biggest opposition party, the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) won the vote in the country while the new opposition alliance made of Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR) and former Prime Minister Dacian Cioloș's party PLUS won the vote in the big cities and diaspora. Meanwhile, the senior ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) got a score of under 24%, down from 45% in the parliamentary elections in December 2016. Their coalition partners from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE) dropped under the 5% threshold and will not be represented in the European Parliament. The voters punished PSD and ALDE for their rhetoric hostile to the EU and its values and the many legislation changes in the justice area that weakened the fight against corruption in the country. PNL won the EU elections with an overall score of 27.7%, according to partial data presented by the Central Electoral Bureau (BEC) after counting 97% of the votes in Romania and over 60% of the votes in the Diaspora. PNL's score was significantly higher than the 20% it got in the parliamentary

elections in December 2016. The biggest surprise of the EU elections was, however, the Alliance 2020 USR+PLUS, which came third with an overall score of 22.7%, less than 1% behind PSD. USR, a relatively young party, got into the Romanian Parliament in December 2016 after it came third in the elections with a score of almost 9%. PSD was second with a score of 23.46%, according to partial results presented by BEC. The other two parties that will be represented in the European Parliament are the People's Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP) of former president Traian Basescu which got 5.93% and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR) with 5.48%. Meanwhile, the junior coalition partner ALDE, led by Senate President and former Prime Minister Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, got a score of only 4.28%, under the 5% threshold needed for getting to the European Parliament. Tariceanu was the only local political leader that openly boycotted the referendum for justice, and paid the price. ([www.romania-insider.com](http://www.romania-insider.com))

- May 27<sup>th</sup>, leader of Romania's ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), Liviu Dragnea, asked Prime Minister Viorica Dancila not to resign and resist the pressures that may appear in this sense after the party's defeat in the elections for the European Parliament. PSD got a score of under 24% in the EU elections and President Klaus Iohannis asked the party to leave power. *"These are not results that PSD can enjoy, analyses must be made fast and seriously,"* Dragnea said after the polls closed and the exit poll estimates were announced. He added that the party's leaders will decide what

needs to be done next and avoided to say he would resign. One of the party's Vice Presidents, Marian Oprisan, asked for Dragnea's immediate resignation due to the poor score in the EU elections. However, Dragnea waltzed around this subject and said that the party would organize a national congress in the following weeks to decide its candidate for the presidential elections at the end of this year and its strategy. He also suggested that PSD members should choose between Bucharest Mayor Gabriela Firea (with whom he had a conflict last year) and Senate president Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, the leader of junior coalition partner ALDE. Dragnea also said that he never said he would run for President, although, just day before the elections, he stated that he would announce the party's candidate on Sunday evening, prompting speculations that he would run himself. The PSD leader suggested that he cannot run because of a potential conviction as High Court Judges are expected to announce the sentence in a corruption case involving him on Monday, one day after the elections. ([www.romani-insider.com](http://www.romani-insider.com))

- May 30<sup>th</sup>, Romania's President Klaus Iohannis urged the Minister of Foreign Affairs Teodor Melescanu and the Minister of Interior Carmen Dan to resign immediately for the way they organized the elections for the European Parliament on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in the country and abroad. The voting was organized to hinder the process, rather than encourage it, Iohannis stated. Many Romanians who wanted to vote in the elections for the European Parliament and the referendum on justice had to stay in line for hours since the number of cabins was insufficient, Iohannis said. The biggest problems were abroad.

The voting stations in some foreign cities were closed before all the citizens showing up to the station had the opportunity to cast their ballots. Thousands of Romanians waited for hours and did not get the chance to vote, Iohannis accused. As he returned from Brussels, he stressed that his peers warmly welcomed the outcome of the public referendum on justice. (www.romani-insider.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Elections for European Parliament deteriorating political situation in Romania. Defeat of ruling PSD raised questions of legitimacy and President Iohannis asked from the Government to resign. Apart from that, PSD leader Liviu Dragnea was sentenced to 3 ½ years in prison for corruption. One could say that political situation in the country is explosive and early parliamentary elections could bring back stability. Besides, citizens expressed their dissatisfaction against the Government with their vote. Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government continues and Iohannis pushes ruling coalition to step down after its looming defeat. The President strongly opposes against Government's plans to intervene in judicial system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state's justice. Although party leader, Liviu Dragnea and Prime Minister Viorica Dancila reject resignation, rapid political developments could not be excluded. Romania is running the Presidency of the Council of EU facing criticism and non-confidence by the EU member states' high officials. The state looks divided in major institutional issues such as national defense,*

*justice, and security. In this context, one should add the direct European Commission's warning for imposing a new control mechanism over state's judicial system and reforms (Rule of Law Framework) in order to avoid activating article 7 of the EU Treaty (suspending certain rights of an EU member state when a country is considered at risk of breaching the EU's core values). The state faces political abnormality in many levels which at the moment could be resolved only by early parliamentary elections. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning has become an advanced base close to Russia. Its strategic importance and role has been upgraded and high level NATO exercises take place in its territory. Consequently, Russia reacts mainly against the NATO military base in Deveselu where anti-missile defense systems have been deployed. Temporarily deployment of THAAD system, a modern high-capability system, may raise tension in the region.*



**SERBIA:** May 28<sup>th</sup>, the Serbian President has ordered the Serbian Army to be put on full combat readiness. The same has been done by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP). This comes after the Kosovo Police “ROSU” Special Unit stormed the north of Kosovo. MUP has put its Special Units on full alert. This information has been confirmed for Tanjug by the MUP on Tuesday morning. Serbia's public broadcaster RTS reported that Serbia has begun diplomatic activity with the aim of having the international community “calm down the Kosovo authorities.” “ROSU” Unit this morning stormed the North, making a number of arrests in all four Serb municipalities there. (www.b92.net)

- May 29<sup>th</sup>, European Commissioner Johannes Hahn told the European Parliament Committee of Foreign Affairs that Serbia has to implement rule of law reforms as the most important condition for progress on its way to EU membership. Hahn presented the European Commission's (EC) annual report on progress achieved by the countries of the Western Balkans to the Committee. He said that Serbia has to act with greater determination to implement reforms and meet the criteria required for chapters 23 and 24 in its pre-accession negotiations with the EU. The report expressed concern over political influence on the judiciary and wide-spread corruption in Serbia, adding that the country has achieved good progress and is moderately prepared in terms of developing a market economy. Hahn said that the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue should lead to a legally binding agreement to normalize relations between Serbia and Kosovo and called both sides to avoid provocation. Hahn said that Pristina's tariffs on goods from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina has cast a shadow on Kosovo's European path and should be revoked immediately. It said that Belgrade has to bring its policies in line with EU Foreign and Security Policies and added that Pristina and Belgrade have to restart their dialogue. The report said that certain progress has been made in the judiciary but warned that the extent of political interference continues to be a cause of concern. The Serbian authorities have also achieved some progress in fighting organized crime and corruption, expressing concern that corruption is prevalent in many sectors and poses serious problems. According to the report, Serbia is moderately prepared for competition pressure and market forces within the Union with some progress made

but the level of investments still below the needs of the economy, a high public debt and incomplete key structural reforms of state-owned companies, the public administration and tax authority and an insufficiently developed private sector. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 30<sup>th</sup>, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic told OSCE Mission Chief Andrea Orizio that judiciary reforms are the most important job faces Serbia. He said the reforms are important "*not because of the European Union, but because of our citizens.*" A statement from the President's cabinet quoted Vucic as saying that judiciary reform is the condition to implement comprehensive reforms, attract more foreign investors and economic stability. He thanked the OSCE for helping draft a new media strategy and improves the media situation in Serbia. "*Cooperation with the OSCE has to continue to improve the media environment through an inclusive process which includes all interested parties,*" Vucic said. The statement quoted the OSCE Mission Chief as saying that the mission will monitor the implementation process and drafting of media laws. It added that the OSCE will continue providing strong support to Serbia in its efforts to implement judiciary reform and promote rule of law and in the fight against corruption and organized crime. (www.rs.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*EC Progress Report on Serbia focuses on judiciary and Kosovo - Serbia relations. There is long distance towards Serbia's European path. The country has entered in a period of fragile political stability due to citizens' reactions*

against governmental practices regarding human rights, media freedom, and elections transparency. Although protesters insist on organizing protests, it seems that opposition reactions lose momentum. According to the President Aleksandar Vucic elections will be held in 2020. It is assessed that Vucic feels more confident that fully controls political situation in Serbia and there is no need for early elections at the moment. Regarding Belgrade – Pristina dialogue there is nothing to be expected in the near future; the whole process has reached a deadlock. Taking into consideration that both sides harden their rhetoric one should not expect any progress in the new meeting in Paris scheduled for July 2019. Kosovo Police Special Forces “ROSU” in Serbian north Kosovo was an expected operation, but escalated tension with Serbia. Armed Forces were put in full alert but without any deployment of units across Serbia – Kosovo border. Serbia strengthens its relations with Russia (and China) seeking stronger support regarding Kosovo case. Security situation is complex and uncertain especially after Police or military operations which hide the possibility of armed violence. None could predict Serbia’s reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation included) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. At the moment, Serbia looks like acting in accordance with the international law aiming at reducing tension in the region. In other words state’s leadership is acting in a “reasonable” and “wise” way avoiding mistakes of the past which have isolated Serbia from the international

community. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its armed forces declaring towards all sides that its Armed Forces are the power of the state.



**SLOVENIA:** May 27<sup>th</sup>, the conservative list of Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS) and Slovenian People's Party (Slovenska Ljudska Stranka – SLS) won Sunday’s EU election in Slovenia ahead of two leftist coalition parties. SDS and SLS coalition received 26.5% of votes electing three MEPs, Social Democrats (Socialni Demokrati - SD) and List of Marjan Šarca (Lista Marjana Šarca - LMS) won 18.6% and 15.6% respectively electing 2 MEPs, and New Slovenia – Christian Democrats (Nova Slovenija – Krščanski Demokrati - NSi) got 11.1% electing one MEP. Turnout at 28.3% was almost four points higher than the EU elections in 2014 but still below projections and significantly lower than the EU average. (www.sta.si)

- May 29<sup>th</sup>, Foreign Ministers of Slovenia and Russia, Miro Cerar and Sergey Lavrov, confirmed that political ties between the two countries are good, as they addressed the media following a meeting in Ljubljana. The two men discussed topical issues, above all the Western Balkans. Cerar told the press that Slovenia deemed it important to nurture regular dialogue at the top level with permanent members of the UN Security Council and key players in international relations. “Being a member of the EU and NATO, Slovenia is striving for stability in the international community, especially in our neighborhood, the Western Balkans. Therefore, we support open dialogue with Russia on all topical issues of

*international significance*,” said Cerar. Lavrov said that all open issues in the region must be resolved in a peaceful manner and through political dialogue. They also commented on tension in Kosovo triggered earlier this week. Lavrov said that tension is a result by those who want to make Balkans a “*sanitary cordon*” targeting Russia, adding that this is being allowed by the EU and NATO. Cerar expressed belief that the events will undoubtedly have broader consequences for the relations between Prishtina and Belgrade. Foreign Ministers also talked about other international challenges such as terrorism, the crises in Syria and Libya, growing tension between the US and Iran, and relations with China. Cerar also underlined the need to do everything possible to resolve the Yemen conflict and bring one of the worst humanitarian disasters to an end. The Ministers announced that Prime Minister Marjan Sarec will visit Russia, accompanied with a business delegation, in mid-September. Russia is the fourth most important partner in terms of Slovenia's Foreign Direct Investments, while Slovenia is becoming an increasingly popular destination among Russian tourists. Cerar added that a bilateral Commission for economic cooperation plays an important role in this and that the body would meet in Slovenia on June 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Moreover, a Slovenian business delegation led by Economic Development and Technology Minister Zdravko Pocivalsek is expected at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in early June. This was the Foreign Ministers' second meeting following Lavrov's arrival on Tuesday. Last night, they met behind closed doors at Strmol Castle, some 20 kilometers north of Ljubljana. Today, Lavrov also held separate meetings with President

Borut Pahor and Prime Minister Marjan Sarec. Pahor said in a tweet that they discussed preparations for the Three Seas Initiative meeting, which Pahor will be hosting next week. They also discussed topical multilateral issues, focusing especially on the Ukraine crisis and the situation in the Western Balkans. The Ukraine crisis was also discussed in the meeting between Lavrov and Sarec, with the Prime Minister's office saying that Slovenia supports a peaceful solution in eastern Ukraine and underlined the importance of Minsk Agreement implementation. (www.sta.si)



Slovenian and Russian Foreign Ministers, Miro Cerar and Sergey Lavrov  
(Photo source: www.mid.ru)

- May 30<sup>th</sup>, Defense Minister (and former Foreign Minister), Karl Erjavec claimed that interviews conducted by the parliamentary Intelligence Oversight Commission had confirmed he had been in no way involved in the border arbitration incident with Croatia. He called that Commission's Chair Matej Tonin a “*notorious liar*” who abuses his post and hurts Slovenia. The Commission plans to continue its investigation into the phone talks – believed they have been



recorded by Croatian Intelligence Services – between the Slovenian arbitration Agent Simona Drenik and the Slovenian member of the arbitration tribunal Jernej Secolec, Erjavec said he hopes “*Tonin’s lying will find end.*” Erjavec was Slovenia’s Foreign Minister when Croatia published the phone conversations in 2015 using them as an excuse to pull out by the arbitration process, said he had been accused of being the mastermind of the scandal. Tonin has claimed that collusion between Drenin and Secolec was ordered by Erjavec. The Minister underlined that Drenin has said that no pressure was put on her, while Secolec interviewed by the Commission along with Drenin and former Slovenian Intelligence Agency (SOVA) acknowledged that he had made a mistake expressing regret. Erjavec expects that Tonin who is leader of the opposition New Slovenia – Christian Democrats (Nova Slovenija – Krščanski Demokrati - NSi) will stop “*abusing*” his leading post. Tonin said that it is Commission’s duty to find out the truth preventing such mistakes from repeating. (www.sta.si)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability. Although the Government is a minority one seeking compromise for survival, Sarec has been proved of being flexible in Slovenia’s politics so far achieving to balance adequately between different political trends. Left party (Levica) is the key factor for Government’s stability and viability by supporting it in the Parliament. Without the Left’s support the Government would be toppled and early elections should be called. At the moment none of the ruling coalition parties wish*

*snap elections. The May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019 European elections had some surprises; Opposition coalition SDS and SLS although won the elections in Slovenia, they lost a seat in European Parliament. Undoubtedly SD had the most successful presence by getting the second place (18.6%) electing one MP. Finally, Levica’s result was disappointing failing to elect any MEP. Electoral results may redefine balance within the ruling coalition but without impressive changes. The Government has to address several internal social issues (increase of minimum wage, health care, pensions etc). Border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia remains active with low scale skirmishes not be excluded periodically. Slovenia implies that the ongoing border dispute may affect its decision regarding Croatia’s membership candidacy in Schengen Zone. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed military force to support Police tasks. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end.*



**TURKEY:** May 29<sup>th</sup>, Turkey’s domestically-produced tactical ballistic missile BORA successfully struck its target after it was used for the first time in actual combat within the



scope of Operation “Claw” in northern Iraq. BORA was developed by Turkish defense giant ROKETSAN; its export version is called KHAN. Turkey is currently meeting 65% of its defense needs through its own local and national defense industry. Turkey launched an aerial and land operation against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants in Northern Iraq's Hakurk region, according to a statement by the Defense Ministry on Tuesday. The military offensive initiated aims to neutralize terrorists in the area and destroy their caves and shelters, the Ministry said. The Ministry underlined that the operation is ongoing as it was planned. (www.yenisafak.com)



BORA Tactical Ballistic Missile

(Photo source: www.roketsan.com.tr)

- May 29<sup>th</sup>, Turkey's hopes of joining the EU are fading, the bloc's executive has said, noting worse conditions in Courts, prisons and the economy, but Ankara rejected the criticisms as “*unfair*” and “*disproportionate*.” Still considered a security ally, Turkey's candidacy to join the world's largest trading group is frozen because of “*further serious backsliding*” on rights, judiciary and economic policy, the EU Commission said in its annual Progress Report on Wednesday. A crackdown following a failed coup in July 2016, a shift to a powerful presidential system with few checks and balances, and closer ties with Russia have alarmed Western leaders and financial markets alike, sending the value of the lira tumbling. “*Turkey has continued to move further*

*away from the European Union,*” the Commission said in its report on Ankara's progress towards membership, a path formally undertaken in 2005. “*Negotiations have ... effectively come to a standstill,*” the Commission added of Turkey. Turkey's Government, which has said it is a victim of anti-Muslim sentiment in the EU and justified crackdowns on the threat from “*terrorists*” at home and abroad, chafed at the report. “*It is not possible for us to accept the unfair and disproportionate criticisms in the report,*” Turkey's Deputy Foreign Minister Faruk Kaymakci told a news conference in Ankara. “*The statements claiming that Turkey is moving away from European values are inconsistent and invalid ... Turkey is a part of Europe. Turkey is Europe,*” he added. (www.aljazeera.com)

- June 2<sup>nd</sup>, Turkey will continue to fight all terrorist groups with resolution and determination, the National Security Council (MGK) said Thursday. The statement was released following an MGK meeting, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It referred to Turkey's Operation “*Claw,*” which continues to target Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) headquarters in northern Iraq. Operation “*Claw*” was launched last Monday. It continued with airstrikes on PKK targets Friday. Turkish jets pounded PKK weapons' positions, shelters and ammunition depots in the Zap region, the National Defense Ministry confirmed in a tweet Friday. With no concrete results from Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) efforts, Turkey decided to take things into its own hands and assume a hard line against the PKK presence in northern Iraq. Last year, Turkish security forces crossed 30 kilometers into northern Iraq and

nearly 200 PKK militants were killed in months of operations. The Hakurk region is among the main locations PKK terrorists use to infiltrate Turkey or attack Turkish border outposts. The area is located some 30-to-40 kilometers south of the Derelik district of southeastern Hakkari province, bordering Iraq, and currently serves as the main base for Kurdish militants between their headquarters in the Qandil mountains near the border with Iran and Turkey. A wide variety of air and land defense platforms are deployed in Turkey's ongoing Operation "Claw" such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and armed drones in the air, self-propelled howitzers, rifles, surface-to-surface missile systems and multi barrel rocket launchers. The armed drone Bayraktar Tactical Block 2 (TB2), developed by Turkey's Baykar Makina, provides intelligence and fire support to security forces. The platform, which served for 4,000 hours during Operation "Olive Branch" ensured success and precise victory in the operation. Another UAV developed by the Turkish Aerospace Industry (TAI), the ANKA-S, is also on duty collecting intelligence and providing assistance for the operation center to precisely aim at targets and locate hostile elements. Having proven its capability in previous counter-terror operations, the domestically developed T129 Tactical Reconnaissance and Attack Helicopter ATAK is another air platform deployed in Operation Claw, boosting the target-attacking capabilities of the Turkish army. Soldiers in the land forces who participate in Operation Claw use the infantry rifle MPT-76, developed and produced completely by national facilities without using technical support from abroad. Domestically developed by Turkey's leading defense firm ROKETSAN, the surface-to-

surface long-range missile BORA has been used in Operation "Claw" for the first time. Finally, the KASIRGA multi barrel rocket launcher system has also been deployed for the first time in the latest operation in northern Iraq. The T-300 MBRL system is capable of firing at critical targets within a range of over 100 kilometers. (www.dailysabah.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Deterioration of Turkish – US relations is a major concern for Turkey threatening its political and economic stability. Purchase of Russian air-defense system S-400 is unacceptable for the US administration threatening directly Turkey with sanctions. Taking into consideration that Turkey is a pivotal country enjoying geopolitical importance and having one of the largest militaries (the 2<sup>nd</sup> within NATO) it is hard to assess that the US seek a full rift with its NATO ally. On the contrary, there are still open official and unofficial channels of communication working on a mutual accepted compromise. The US needs Turkey and the opposite. Economic recession does not help the Turkish President to strengthen his position internally undermining his political power. Turkey is heading in a major economic crisis. It seems that economy is the major Turkish problem which may be emerged as the "Achilles' heel" for Erdogan and his political long reign. Revote of municipal elections in Istanbul raises questions for the whole process and transparency of procedure. Free and fair elections are under question in Turkey taking into consideration that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and ruling AKP fully controls Justice system and state's institutions. Scheduled*

*for June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019 elections in Istanbul will be a “stress test” for Turkish democratic principles and values. However, it is proved that loss of Istanbul municipality – the biggest Turkish city and trade hub which was under AKP control last 15 years – was a “bitter defeat” for Erdogan. Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. EC Progress Report on Turkey was disappointing “freezing” any further development regarding its accession process. Turkey strongly reacted in diplomatic and political level claiming that “Turkey belongs to Europe; Turkey is Europe.” Turkish Armed Forces declares its readiness to intervene militarily in Syria, eastern of Euphrates river but the US does not give the “green light” aiming at protecting Syrian Kurds and YPG. Turkey is reinforcing its troops in the Turkish – Syrian borders waiting for the “green light” for establishing a safe zone in Syria but it is doubtful if it will ever get it. There are thoughts of unilateral action within Syria but such a decision may bring Turkish troops against the U.S forces; an unprecedented scenario. At the same time Turkish Armed Forces launched operation “Claw” in North Iraq against PKK aiming at eliminating Kurdish threat. In operation’s context the Armed Forces have deployed a variety of domestically produced weapons including armed UAV’s, Attack Helicopters, Tactical Ballistic Missiles, and rifles. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its doctrine for a*

*diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. In Eastern Mediterranean Turkey reacted eventually by sending its drillship Fatih (accompanied by three other ships) to show its presence and to claim its interests. It was an expected reaction and it is assessed that Turkey entered in the East Mediterranean geostrategic and energy rivalry showing determination by action. The cost so far, for Turkey, is zero achieving simultaneously to question Cypriot sovereign rights. International reactions (US, EU etc) has limited in a couple of “warm words of support and sympathy” to Cyprus leaving initiative of action to Turkey. In this context, Turkey strengthened its diplomatic efforts to convince international community for its fair rights in the maritime region. Furthermore, Turkey is ready to send a second drillship in the region (publishing a new NAVTEX) promoting its interests. It is assessed that Turkey is fully determined to escalate tension in the region including armed violence (if it is necessary) aiming at securing its interests. Taking into consideration that Cyprus and Greece act in coordination and the latter guarantees defense and security of Cyprus it cannot be excluded an accidental or pre-planned “hot incident” in Cyprus or the Aegean Sea.*

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**NOTE**

-  Stable situation. No security risk
-  Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored
-  Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions
-  Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk
-  Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict