



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: April 26th, within hours of the polls closing last night, Tom Doshi announced his resignation from his position as Chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Socialdemokrate e Shqipërisë – PSD). This paves the way for the Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS) to form a coalition with the PSD which is set to take 2 seats in the Parliament. With Doshi in position, this would not have been possible or it would have been heavily criticized by the US and other internationals. (www.exit.al)

- April 26th, according to the OSCE preliminary report on the Albanian parliamentary elections it was found that the ruling Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS) secured considerable advantage by misusing state resources. Moreover, vote-buying remains a serious problem in Albania and they are investigating allegations presented to them. (www.exit.al)

- April 27th, Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS) has secured its third consecutive mandate in a parliamentary election, winning nearly half of votes and enough seats in Parliament to govern alone, electoral authorities announced. The Central Election Commission said that with 98% of the ballots from Sunday's voting counted, PS had won 49% of the vote and 74 of Parliament's 140 seats. The main opposition centre-right Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) got 39% of the ballots and 59 seats, while its ally, the Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI), won 7% of the vote and 4 seats. Social Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Socialdemokrate e Shqipërisë – PSD) got 2% and

3 seats. Preliminary turnout on Sunday was almost 48%, slightly higher than four years ago. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 28th, the Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS) is set to launch the procedure to dismiss President Ilir Meta once the Central Elections Commission has announced the final result of April 25th, 2021 elections in the country. (www.exit.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling PS got a clean victory in the parliamentary elections of April 25th, 2021 and it is able to form a majority Government. However, there serious allegations for vote buying and misuse of state resources by PS. Despite such accusations it is estimated that PS remains the first political force in the country and opposition failed to persuade voters for its alternative political proposal. The Prime Minister, Edi Rama remains the absolute dominant of the state's politics, but he has to act with political wisdom and flexibility to avoid further political tension in the country. Announcement of PS that it will initiate the dismissal of incumbent President, Ilir Meta is not for the right direction of political stability. The new Government has to intensify its actions for fighting corruption, money laundering and smuggling (drugs, weapons, people etc). Besides, it is urgent Albanian political elite to clean allegations that it enjoys enmeshed interests with organized crime. Strategic goal of the new Government should be acceleration of the EU accession process which has stagnated due to the EU's refusal to schedule the first intergovernmental conference between Brussels and Tirana signaling the official start of the accession process. Under current political

situation it is rather doubtful that Albania will achieve to get a date within the 2021.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

April 26th, the uproar over the recently published alleged ‘*non-paper*’ on redrawing borders in the Western Balkans is being used to attack Bosnia’s Republika Srpska (RS) entity because the idea of it seceding from the country is being discussed in Europe, said the Chairman of BiH’s tripartite Presidency, Milorad Dodik. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- April 28th, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) Josep Borrell held a phone call with the members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik, Sefik Dzaferovic, and Zeljko Komsic where he expressed concern over the rise in nationalistic and divisive rhetoric in the country. He urged the Presidency members to engage in dialogue with each other and foster an environment conducive to unity, consensus and constructive engagement in the interest of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, by lowering political tension and promoting reconciliation. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- April 29th, there is a danger that unfounded speculation on redrawing borders in the Western Balkans along ethnic lines will cause instability in this region, as the Spokesman of the State Department of the US), Ned Price, said in a statement. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- April 30th, the Russian Embassy in Sarajevo reacted in the statements of the US State Department Special Envoy for the Western Balkans Matthew Palmer and the US Ambassador

to Bosnia and Herzegovina Eric Nelson. According to the Embassy, the US officials are trying to put the blame to Russia for all the troubles of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

In the wake of the rhetoric for border redraw in Western Balkans where Bosnia has a central role, confrontation is ongoing not only between the Bosnian ethnic groups, but also in the international community. Bosnian Serbs strongly support a peaceful secession from the country, while the Muslim Bosnians (Bosniaks) advocate that redraw of state’s borders would lead in a war. The EU and US reject any idea of border change in the region as dangerous for peace and stability. Current situation favors nationalist rhetoric in the country which threatens its stability. However, rhetoric for border change has brought in the surface the need for amendment of the Dayton peace agreement in a more functional model. Bosnia has become a field of rivalry between the US (and EU) and Russia. Taking into consideration that Bosnia is not an EU and NATO member state, one could understand the reason that Bosnia has been targeted by Moscow. In other words there is fertile soil for influence activity towards the country. Experts do not exclude attempts of destabilization of the country by the Russian factor. Under current situation the US may push Bosnia for rapid progress regarding the country’s NATO accession. Croatia and Serbia continue to treat Bosnia as their protectorate interfering in its internal affairs. Bosnia is far from joining the EU since the country suffers from corruption, absence of rule of law, difficulties in respect of human

rights, weak public administration, democratic deficit and its economic performance is one of the lowest in Europe.



BULGARIA: April 28th, the second large parliamentary party There Is Such a People (Ima Takav Narod – ITN) has decided to return the mandate to form a Government that it received by the President, Rumen Radev. (www.novinite.com)

- April 29th, Bulgaria declared another Russian diplomat a “*persona non grata*” and asked the Russian authorities for full assistance in investigating the explosions in Bulgarian arms depots, the destruction of physical evidence in a fire and the poisoning of three Bulgarian citizens so that the perpetrators could be identified. (www.novinite.com)

- April 30th, Bulgaria has been added to Russia’s “*blacklist*” of unfriendly countries. As of yesterday morning, the country has been placed on the list of potential enemies, according to the main Russian federal TV channel “*Rossiya 1*.” (www.novinite.com)

- May 1st, at a special meeting, the national council of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (Balgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP) approved a recommendation by the executive bureau that the party would immediately return the mandate for forming a Government to be offered on Wednesday by President Roumen Radev. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Grazhdani za Evropeysko Razvitie na Balgariya – GERB) - Union of Democratic Forces (Sayuz na Demokratichnite Sili – SDS) coalition

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Decision of the second largest party ITN (and actual winner of the parliamentary elections of April 4th, 2021) to return its mandate to form a Government makes new elections as the most possible scenario. Not only that but Bulgarian Socialists, the third party in the Parliament also announced that it will return the mandate when the President will hand it over to BSP. Current situation maintains political instability of the country. If no agreement on forming a Government is reached, the President appoints a caretaker Government, dissolves the National Assembly and schedules new elections on a date two months hence. Bulgaria – North Macedonia relations remain tense due to Sofia’s decision to block Skopje progress of accession negotiations. Tension between Moscow and Sofia is strengthened. Russia surprisingly included Bulgaria in the list with “unfriendly states,” while Bulgaria expelled another Russian diplomat last week. According to Bulgarian justice authorities several explosions in arms depots and poisoning of three Bulgarians are attributed to Russian agents. Southeastern Europe countries which have joined the EU and NATO (such as Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia) implement a hard policy towards Russia since an “influence war” is evolving in the region. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). Military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force.



CROATIA: April 27th, Foreign Minister Gordan Grlic-Radman said that Croatian

Ambassador to Serbia, Hidajet Biscevic “enjoys the support of Croatian Government,” in a statement commenting on accusations leveled at Biscevic by the leader of ethnic Croats in Serbia. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- April 27th, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic visited the Peljesac Bridge construction site in Komarna, noting that the bridge will be connected with span structures by October this year, which means that “the main goal will be attained - to ensure the integrity of the state territory,” Croatian state agency Hina informed the public on Tuesday. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- April 28th, opposition says it will file no-confidence motion against the Health Minister, Vili Beros accusing him of not only failing to coordinate an adequate response to the coronavirus outbreak, but also of rigging the public tender for the creation of an online platform that citizens can use to sign up for a vaccination appointment within Government’s mass vaccination program. (www.glashrvat-ske.hrt.hr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

Opposition insists on filing a motion of no-confidence against the Health Minister, Vili Beros due to his failure on dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the no-confidence motion has little chances to succeed, it is assessed that the opposition is raising its voice due to the coming local elections scheduled for May 16th, 2021. The country continues to interfere in Bosnian affairs seeking to promote its national interests. Accession in the Schengen Zone and Eurozone is a strategic goal since it will benefit the state regarding economy, trade, and security. Illegal

migration in borders with Bosnia remains a major problem for the country, despite the significant reduce of migrants last two months. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces’ modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: April 28th, the former President of Parliament, Demetris Syllouris and a former Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού - AKEL) MP, Christakis Giovanis refused to answer any questions on Wednesday put to them by the panel investigating Cyprus’ controversial citizenship by investment program, citing advice from their counsels to exercise the right of silence over their involvement. Syllouris and Giovanis were forced to resign last year after Al Jazeera aired an undercover video of them offering help to a fictitious Chinese businessman with a criminal record to secure citizenship. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- April 29th, after an intense three days in Geneva, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday there was not enough common ground for Cyprus negotiations to re-start, but they would try again in the near future. (www.cyprus-mail.com)



5+1 Meeting in Geneva for the Cypriot Question

(Photo source: www.dam.media.un.org)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The 5+1 informal meeting on the Cypriot question was held in Geneva on April 27th – 29th, 2021 without positive results. As already was predicted by international analysts and policy makers, the meeting failed and the deadlock for the starting of official talks is maintained. Turkish Cypriot community backed by Turkey advocates the idea of two sovereign states which it is not only out of question for Cyprus, but it is out of the UN official line of a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation. However, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres was not discouraged by the failed meeting and announced that he will call for a new meeting in the near future. The Cypriot President, Nikos Anastasiades tried to surprise the other part by introducing Confidence Building Measures (CBM) but his proposal was rejected by the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot side. The country is moving towards parliamentary elections scheduled for May 30th, 2021. Cyprus is strengthening its relations with regional states following a foreign policy of multilateral cooperation in several fields. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize). As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: April 28th, the Government Council for Foreign Affairs and Defense (KYSEA) approved on Tuesday the establishment of a Special Warfare Command as part of an effort to modernize the country's Special Forces,

which will acquire an interdisciplinary role. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 29th, an independent investigation in Greece said authorities have failed to adequately respond to multiple allegations of summary deportations of migrants at the Greek - Turkish border. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- April 29th, Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias said on Thursday that “no common ground” was found on the Cyprus issue during an unofficial five-part meeting called by the UN Secretary General in Geneva to see whether there was enough consensus to resume peace talks between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Greece enjoys political stability. The Government is adequately coping with the COVID-19 pandemic preparing the country for a successful tourist season. Increased tourist flows during the summer are of great importance for Greece in an effort to strengthen its economy which has been damaged due to the pandemic. Tension with Turkey remains low, although there is diplomatic activity. Greek Foreign Minister, Nikos Dendias joined the 5+1 meeting in Geneva for the Cypriot question without any tangible result. Greece implements an ambitious project for strengthening the Armed Forces seeking to modernize the Navy and Air Force power by purchasing new frigates and fighter jets. Apart from that Greek Armed Forces implements some structural reforms aiming to modernize command and control during operations. In this context, the Greek General Staff announced the establishment of the Special Warfare Command seeking to

facilitate the effective use of Special Forces in operations.



KOSOVO: April 26th, after Josep Borell, the European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, announced on Monday the resumption of the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relation for May 11th in Brussels, Perparim Kryeziu, Kosovo's Government Spokesperson, said no one informed Pristina about that. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 27th, German Ambassador Jorn Rohde to Pristina denied later on Tuesday a local media report about a French - German non-paper on Kosovo suggesting solutions for the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue and possible comprehensive agreement including an autonomous district and privileged status for the Serbian Orthodox Church. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 28th, Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti told N1 I Brussels on Wednesday that there would not be a new round of the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations on May 11th, as announced by Josep Borell, the EU High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 30th, Croatia is willing to help Kosovo in its efforts to transform its security forces into a regular army, Defense Minister, Mario Banozic, said on Friday. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Prishtina rejected the announcement of the European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security, Josep Borell that the Kosovo

– Serbia dialogue will start again on May 11th, 2021. The Government announced that decision for dialogue resumption was taken by the EU and Serbia unilaterally without Kosovo's consent. The Prime Minister, Albin Kurti has declared from the very first moment he took office that dialogue with Belgrade is not his priority. Nevertheless, it is assessed that pressure by the EU and US towards Kosovo for dialogue restart will be strengthened in the near future forcing Kurti to sit on the table of talks. Besides, it is a time that rumors are spread for non-papers which propose various resolutions for the Kosovo issue. Following the alleged non-paper released by Slovenia, it was Germany's turn to refute that it has sent a non-paper together with France proposing a resolution on Kosovo. Taking into consideration current situation, it is assessed that various circles spread rumors to configure certain climate before the restart of Belgrade – Prishtina talks testing public opinion reaction. Kosovo needs urgently institutional reforms especially in the fields of economy, rule of law, public administration, justice and democratic rule. Organized crime, corruption, money laundering, weak public administration, absence of rule of law, controlled justice, transactions between politicians and criminals are persistent "open sores" for Kosovo. Transformation of Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into a regular army could become a source of tension with Serbia. As long as Kosovo status is undefined it will suffer from restricted sovereignty and political instability and uncertainty.



MOLDOVA: April 27th, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs says the US and the EU interfere in the internal political processes in

Moldova and their political commitment contributes to greater polarization of Moldovan society. In this connection, it recommends the US and the EU to refrain from interfering in Moldova's internal affairs and not to go beyond the diplomatic ethnic norms, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- April 28th, President Maia Sandu signed the decree to dissolve Parliament. The announcement was made by Sandu in the evening of April 28th after the Constitutional Court ruled that the Parliament decision to declare a state of emergency is unconstitutional. The snap parliamentary elections will be held on July 11th, 2021 IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- April 30th, the Central Election Commission (CEC) approved the probable expenditure estimate for the organization and holding of the snap parliamentary elections of July 11th, 2021. This is of 125.046,7 million lei, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The pro-western President Maia Sandu achieved its political goal to dissolve the Parliament and call for snap elections. With one way or another, moving on the edge of constitutional order Sandu achieved its strategic task. However, there serious concerns that the President exercised "pressure" on the Constitutional Court (CC) to declare political decisions of the Parliament as unconstitutional. CC's decisions facilitated dissolution of the Parliament and call of early elections for July 11th, 2021. PAS have the chance to become the first political force in the new parliament securing total control of state's power for Sandu. The President enjoys full

political support by the EU and US. It seems by the dissolution of Parliament and schedule of snap elections the country exits from a harsh political crisis. This is a very optimistic idea since there is a long road until the election day. The fact is that the country, its institutions, the Constitution and citizens are damaged by this political crisis. Taking into consideration that Moldova enjoys privileged geopolitical role in the region, the west (namely the US and EU) and Russia struggle for influence. In this context, the three rivals have strongly interfered in Moldova's politics seeking to secure their interests. Russia reacted last week with a strict statement accusing the US and EU for interference in state's internal affairs; showing nervousness and embarrassment for ongoing political situation which does not favor Moscow. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: April 26th, in the case of state guarantees for the loans of Aluminum Plant Podgorica (KAP), the Police this morning arrested several people, among whom is the former Minister of Economy Branko Vujovic, RTCG learned. (www.rtcg.me)

- April 27th, Minister of Economic Development Jakov Milatovic said that he believes that Montenegro will find a way to agree with China on the repayment of the debt for the highway. He said as a guest on the national television of Croatia that the EU has an interest in repaying that debt and negotiations on refinancing with cheaper European loans are underway. (www.rtcg.me)

- April 28th, in the latest Freedom House report, Montenegro was perceived once again as a “hybrid regime.” (www.rtcg.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Arrest of the former Minister of Economy, Branko Vujovic due to a state scandal could be said that signals the beginning of investigation of scandals that members of the former Government of DPS are involved. When the ruling coalition took office announced that fight of corruption is a top priority sending a clear message to the outgoing DPS that investigation on the 30 years of ruling will come in the near future. The Montenegrin debt to China is a “headache” for the Government threatening its sovereign rights. The economic burden is not manageable by Montenegro itself and China could push Podgorica to cede sovereign rights. The EU has certain strategic interests to limit Chinese penetration in Europe and in this sense the Montenegrin problem could become an EU problem. Moreover, the Montenegrin debt to China is a good reason for the EU to push the pro-Russian/pro-Serbian Government of Montenegro for political compromise. Certain internal and external stakeholders work on destabilizing the Government. The EU and US consider the Montenegrin ruling coalition as pro-Russian setting a threat for the Southeastern Europe political and security stability. Montenegro needs concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Montenegro is closer to the EU accession than any other Western Balkan

country but current political situation puts at risk its European future.



NORTH MACEDONIA: April 26th, no-confidence vote against the Interior Minister, Oliver Spasovski filed by the opposition was rejected by the Parliament with 60 votes against and 11 in favor. (www.republika.mk)



Minister of Interior, Oliver Spasovski

(Photo source: www.mvr.gov.gr)

- April 26th, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) party left Parliament’s session in relation to the no confidence motion against Minister Oliver Spasovski announcing that it will file a no confidence motion against Parliament Speaker Talat Xhaferi. (www.republika.mk)

- April 29th, President Stevo Pendarovski said that North Macedonia will have to compromise with Bulgaria, and that it remains to be seen how difficult it will be. Bulgaria is blocking North Macedonia from opening EU accession talks as it

demands serious concessions on issues of national identity and history. (www.republika.mk)

- April 29th, President Stevo Pendarovski agreed in a TV interview with the request of the opposition Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) party and the protesters who poured out in Skopje on Sunday, that the defendants of the April 27th trial are not terrorists and that the sentences against them are Draconian. (www.republika.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Tension was increased in North Macedonia's politics last week due to opposition's initiative to file a motion of no confidence against the Interior Minister, Oliver Spasovski. Main opposition party VMRO-DPMNE is trying to polarize political situation in the country seeking to the call of snap elections. However, the no confidence motion was rejected by the Parliament confirming that the Government remains stable. Despite that, tension is increased in the country due to the "April 27th" case when VMRO-DPMNE supporters invaded in the Parliament back in 2017 knowing as "bloody Thursday." 16 people were sentenced to jail over their role in the case with severe sentences. Currently, VMRO-DPMNE is demanding the review of the case speaking for "draconian sentences." North Macedonia's EU accession process is still blocked by Bulgaria due to historical and identity disputes. The President, Stevo Pendarovski has spoken for "compromise" confirming that Skopje is in difficult situation. Corruption reigns in the country, while the

establishment of rule of law is another challenge for the state. The Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev enjoys a fragile majority in the Parliament and his cabinet is rather unstable and vulnerable to political blackmail.



ROMANIA: April 26th, Romanian authorities have declared Alexey Grishaev, the Deputy Military Attaché of Russia's Embassy to Romania, persona non grata, the Foreign Affairs Ministry announced. (www.romania-insider.com)

- April 26th, Romania is interested in resolving protracted conflicts around the Black Sea, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has launched some initiatives at EU level, according to a statement from the Presidential Administration. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The ruling coalition has overcome its internal crisis and appears stable. Besides there are several challenges ahead such as the COVID-19 pandemic, adoption and implementation of the Romanian recovery plan and state reforms, which they need a strong and stable Government. Apart from that Romania faces several security challenges in the wider region of Eastern Europe and the Black Sea. In this context, Romania enjoys advanced upgrade in the US and NATO strategic and operational planning due to its geographical position located close to Russia. One should keep in mind that Romania is the Eastern bastion of NATO in a rather unstable region. This assessment is strengthened due to the latest deployment of Russian troops in the eastern border of Ukraine which escalates tension in the wider region of Black Sea. Expulsion of an

official of the diplomatic mission of the Russian mission in Bucharest is included in the NATO and EU member states' retaliation measures against Russian actions to Czech Republic. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO.



SERBIA: April 26th, the US Ambassador Anthony Godfrey said that a “malignant influence” was blocking Serbia on the road to the European Union. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 26th, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borell said the bloc expected Serbia to fulfil its reform agenda, especially in the rule of law and media freedom, adding it was also important for Belgrade to adjust its foreign and security policies with that of the Brussels since many member countries demanded it. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 27th, according to the Balkan Security Network, the Serbian Armed Forces could be interested in buying airplanes, vehicles, anti-armor missiles and radar systems from the US. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- April 28th, Serbian Parliament Speaker Ivica Dacic said that the European Parliament mediated inter-party dialogue to improve election conditions will not start before June. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- May 1st, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said that the next elections will be held either in March or in April 2022, as it is written by the law. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Serbia is obviously delaying the beginning of inter-party dialogue with the opposition aiming to downgrade the whole process. Despite, the European Parliament's special interest for the successful conduct of the dialogue with tangible results, it could be said that the process is stalled and the ruling coalition deliberately downgrades and delays talks. A failed intra-party dialogue will have a direct impact for Serbia not only in the 2022 general elections, but also in the European route of the country. Besides, the EU is pushing Belgrade to improve its performances in rule of law, media freedom and election conditions. The country is moving to edge of western world, China and Russia. Having declared official neutrality, Serbia avoids joining one bloc or another. In this context, the EU is strengthening its pressure towards Serbia to adjust its foreign policy with the Brussels one. In other words, the EU demands from Belgrade to reduce its economic, political and defense ties with China and Russia. It should be noted that Serbia is the closest and most loyal partner of Russia in Southeast Europe. Belgrade appears ready and committed in dialogue with Kosovo agreeing with the European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borell for talks' resumption on May 11th, 2021. Actually, the President Aleksandar Vucic has achieved skillfully to transfer the burden of dialogue's restart to Kosovo “court.” Corruption, organized crime, public administration accountability, media freedom are the main internal challenges for the country. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the

state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.



SLOVENIA: April 30th, state budget revenue in the first quarter of the year amounted to 2.4 billion Euro, up 1% year-on-year, while expenditure rose by 37% to almost 3.68 billion Euro for a deficit of nearly 1.27 billion Euro, up from 304.9 million Euro in the same period last year. The Finance Ministry said the higher expenditure was mostly due to measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on companies and individuals with wage payments increasing by 13.2% to 391.3 million Euro. (www.sta.si)

- April 28th, the Government adopted the national recovery and resilience plan to send it to the European Commission. The plan will serve as the basis to draw funds from the 750 billion Euros fund for recovery following the coronavirus crisis, with Slovenia expecting 2.47 billion Euros in funds (www.sta.si)

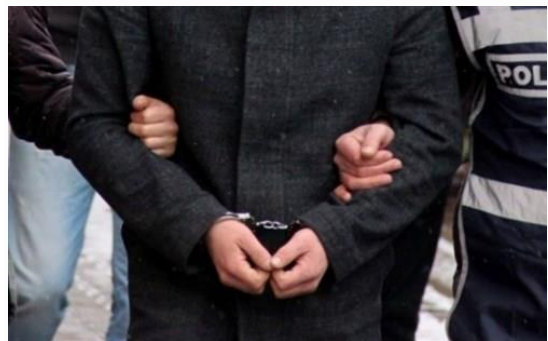
COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The minority Government of Janez Jansa enjoys fragile stability. The ruling coalition adopted a recovery plan from the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems that the Slovenian economy has been damaged by the pandemic. Slovenian Armed Forces are incapable for war operations; a major problem for the state's defense and security capacity. The state pays special attention in upgrading the Armed Forces capabilities and in this context has approved a 780 million Euros armament project aiming to modernize them. Procurement of transport aircrafts and helicopters has been set as a priority.



TURKEY: April 26th, Turkey's lira has edged lower in early trading, adding to a recent slide and nearing an all-time low as a chill settled on relations with the US and after the new central bank Chief signaled that interest rate hikes would harm the economy. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 26th, Turkish Prosecutors have ordered the arrest of 532 suspects, including 459 serving military personnel, in an operation targeting people linked to Fethullah Gulen, the Muslim preacher and businessman Ankara says was behind a 2016 attempted coup, according to Anadolu news agency. (www.aljazeera.com)



Arrest of Turkish citizens by Police accused of linked to Fethullah Gulen network (archive photo)
(Photo source: www.icislerigov.tr)

- April 26th, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has denounced US President Joe Biden's recognition of the Armenian genocide as "groundless" and harmful to bilateral ties. (www.aljazeera.com)

- April 27th, some of Turkey's biggest banks are reluctant to finance President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's planned Istanbul canal due to environmental concerns and the investment risks hanging over the massive construction project, four senior bankers told Reuters. (www.reuters.com)

- April 29th, Ankara will maintain its support for a two-state solution in Cyprus based on the sovereign equality of the Turkish and Greek sides on the island in all areas, the country's Vice President, Fuat Oktay said on Thursday. Oktay said that during recent informal talks on the future of Cyprus held in Geneva, the Greek Cypriot administration had maintained its attitude favoring deadlock on the island. (www.aa.com.tr)

- April 29th, Turkey's Central Bank increased the country's year-end inflation forecast to 14.1% for this year, up from 12.2% in its previous report. (www.aa.com.tr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Recognition of Armenian genocide by the US President Joe Biden was condemned by Ankara which claims that Washington ignored the historic facts. The already deteriorating relations between the two countries were strongly damaged due to Biden's decision. It is assessed that recognition of the Armenian genocide was the latest chapter of the US reactions against Turkey due to the latter's actions which have frustrated the American administration (purchase of the S400 anti-aircraft missile system, violation of human rights etc). Nevertheless, Washington and Ankara maintain open channels of communication and actually the US administration considers Turkey as an ally. Ankara knows very well its strategic importance in the wider region of the Middle East and "uses its card" skillfully in the diplomatic field. Turkey continues its diplomatic activity in regional affairs and currently focuses on re-establishing its ties with Egypt. Restoring relations with Cairo is essential for Ankara to maintain balance in Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

It seems that economy remains the weakest link of Turkey as lira has edged lower in early trading last week. The PKK militants consist a permanent threat of Turkish security. Thus, the Turkish Armed Forces launch military operations not only in the Turkish territory, but also in the Iraqi one seeking to eliminate their bases. Turkish authorities continue to violate human rights, media freedom and democratic rule. Arrests of political opponents, journalists who criticize the ruling AKP and political activists is a common practice. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Turkey could not be considered as a democracy but rather as a "hybrid democracy" since the President adopts authoritarian practices.


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NOTE

 Stable situation. No security risk.

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.

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

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

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