



Briefing

Political Trends & Dynamics

Diplomacy in Southeast Europe

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POLITICAL TRENDS & DYNAMICS IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

A FES DIALOGUE SOUTHEAST EUROPE PROJECT

Peace and stability initiatives represent a decades-long cornerstone of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's work in southeastern Europe. Recent events have only reaffirmed the centrality of Southeast European stability within the broader continental security paradigm. Both democratization and socio-economic justice are intrinsic aspects of a larger progressive peace policy in the region, but so too are consistent threat assessments and efforts to prevent conflict before it erupts. Dialogue SOE aims to broaden the discourse on peace and stability in southeastern Europe and to counter the securitization of prevalent narratives by providing regular analysis that involves a comprehensive understanding of human security, including structural sources of conflict. The briefings cover fourteen countries in southeastern Europe: the seven post-Yugoslav countries and Albania, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania, and Moldova.

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EDITORIAL

Jasmin Mujanović, Alida Vračić and Ioannis Armakolas

An effective diplomatic apparatus and posture is critical to a state's endeavors in the international arena. From trade pacts to bilateral disputes, alliances and conflicts; the shape and course of each of these is in many regards determined by the efficacy of one's diplomacy. What then is the state of diplomacy in the Western Balkans, three decades after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the fall of communism?

In this edition of *Political Trends and Dynamics* we consult with former foreign ministers and diplomats to assess the successes and ongoing challenges in the practice of diplomacy in the region. In so doing, we discover that while the region's ongoing political tumult remains a categorical concern, the collective marginal status of the Western Balkans presents relatively uniform problems for all regional capitals. Moreover, the changing geopolitical postures of the great powers have, by and large, adversely affected the interests of local polities, who have since the 90s largely benefited (even depended) from international unipolarity. Still, forced to adapt, some regional capitals have tried their hand at balancing between in the new East-West imbroglio, while simultaneously attempting to advance their own agendas.

The question looming over this issue is a familiar one: can the *craft* of diplomacy address or even overcome the often toxic tenacity of politics? Especially in a region with as many bilateral and even internal political disputes as the Western Balkans. We offer no definitive answers, but the experiences of our respective contributors do suggest encouraging examples of how significant breakthroughs can still be realized, in spite of widespread political intransigence in the respective capitals.

This in turn offers critical fodder for thinking about the region's future. As the existing EU paradigm in the Western Balkans has evidently begun to fade and a clear alternative has yet to emerge, and as the specter of renewed security crises rears its ugly head in a number of regional polities, the art of diplomacy becomes more important than ever. Avenues for dispute resolution and de-escalation, even on seemingly minute matters, may soon become matters of existential import for the whole of the continent.

As ever, *Political Trends and Dynamics* in Southeast Europe aims to deliver analysis which is anticipatory in its reflections. This edition takes a lot at the nuts and bolts of the practice of diplomacy in the region, with an eye to its probable reemergence as a centerpiece of Western Balkan politics — for better or for worse.

CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

EDITORIAL . 3

INTERVIEW WITH DITMIR BUSHATI . 4

SMALL STATES IN THE REGION: FROM INTUITIVE TOWARDS "SMART" DIPLOMACY . 7

Vesko Garčević

INTERVIEW WITH VESNA PUSIĆ . 10

WHAT IT TAKES TO BECOME A GOOD DIPLOMAT: TWO CENTS FOR EMERGING PROFESSIONALS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS . 12

Jasmin Hasić

POLITICAL TRENDS & DYNAMICS OVERVIEW . 15

DANGEROUSLY ADRIFT? . 16

ELECTIONS: BETWEEN CLOUD AND CLARITY . 16

GOVERNMENT RISE, SHAKE, AND FALL . 18

SECURITY . 20

EU PROGRESS? . 22

INTERVIEW WITH DITMIR BUSHATI

FES: In your opinion, how does being a diplomat in the Western Balkans differ to being a diplomat in other parts of Europe, and what today are the greatest challenges for young diplomats in the region?

DB: Diplomacy remains a key instrument of foreign policy and international relations, a genuine force for good. In the past, diplomacy was a prestigious but discrete profession, usually, though not always, conducted at a prudent remove from the eyes of the public. Nowadays diplomats are themselves becoming targets of the international media and public, not as exceptions, as was previously the case. Diplomacy and diplomats have become part of the day-to-day life not only of people involved in international relations but also of the international organizations, civil society and business, just to name a few. Diplomats are seen not only in conference rooms but also in the field.

The extent to which diplomacy is a social institution is now more visible than ever. In the early 21st century societal transformations have had a much greater impact on diplomacy than in earlier periods, when the authority of elites was questioned less than is the case today. Confronted with fast moving change in society, governments have a hard time anticipating developments, even though new technological capabilities appear to enhance the capacity for forecasting future trends.

Despite the context, the profession of the diplomat is the same, if I may call it so because in my perspective, it is more-so a way of life. Diplomats, wherever they serve, have a lot in common. The differences are subtle. Wherever you come from, you must deal with national issues that are also of an international nature. So the issues are therefore interconnected. Consequently, more mechanisms for conflict resolution are being created, and more regional organizations are providing opportunities for further co-operation. The implications of these developments for both the substance and the style of diplomacy are far reaching. There are at least three factors shaping global politics, which should be taken into consideration from diplomats in our region:



Ditmir Bushati served as Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania from 2013 to 2019.

- (i) **A changing environment:** The world is undergoing rapid changes which affect all of us. Geopolitically speaking, diplomats from the region are facing challenges generated from security threats like waves of migration from regions in conflict, democratic instability, the influence of third actors and unsolved bilateral issues.
- (ii) **Collapse of trust and popular consent:** The COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions sent shockwaves across the world. It also exposed underlying problems with societies. The pandemic is not the underlying cause for why some people question or even oppose policies regarding public health, but a symptom. The debate over vaccination is more a stand-off between competing narratives than public health. Competing narratives that have emerged, indicate fundamentally, a crisis in terms of values. Unfortunately, this will antagonize people and bring more division and sow discord. We see this all over Europe, as well as in the Western Balkans. Moreover, in our region we are witnessing the corrosion of trust in public institutions coupled with a brain hemorrhage. We are losing people because there is no viable trust that could spark hope.
- (iii) **Rise of authoritarianism:** In times of crises (financial, health or climate or related) people look for quick solutions and strong leadership which sometimes translates into worshipping the cult of individualism and the top

to bottom style of leadership. Crises are all about fear, and fear is all you need to ensure an authoritarian style of governance - a governance that places more emphasis in safety versus liberty. In the Western Balkans where democracy is a rather latecomer and not yet established, this means that we need to pay attention to a stifling of the democratic spirit. We need to make sure that the young generation is educated in this spirit.

FES: *The foreign policies of the Western Balkan states seem to be fully focused on the EU accession agenda. How does Western Balkan diplomacy respond to other emerging global challenges (climate change, energy politics, and green transition, or the challenge of digitalization)?*

DB: The EU and NATO encircle the Western Balkans, which conduct almost three quarters of their trade with the EU. Most foreign investments come from the Union and their financial system is to a considerable extent in the hands of EU banks. Therefore, it is logical that reaching the EU remains the region's immediate goal.

In a way, driving towards the EU is also driving towards tackling challenges related to climate change, energy and digitalization, as those issues are of mutual interest. The Western Balkans is one of the regions in Europe most heavily affected by the impacts of climate change and this trend is projected to continue. So far, the EU has been leading the way in the transition towards a climate-neutral economy and has much to offer in terms of experience with decoupling economic growth from resource use. The EU's experience, know-how and resources can support the Western Balkans in their efforts to enhance resilience and adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Although significant progress has been made towards improving connectivity between the Western Balkan countries, a regional energy market is yet to be accomplished. Coal is still crucial to the energy sector in the Western Balkans, accounting for around 70% of electricity produced in the region. Albania, with developed hydropower usage, is a notable exception. In this sense, a regional approach to infrastructure management and planning is fundamental to deliver resource efficiency gains and reduce costs. Energy efficiency must be integrated in future energy-related policy and investment decisions.

One way of responding to the above-mentioned challenges is through the adoption of the Action Plan on the Green Agenda of the Western Balkans, which embodies the "putting words into actions" paradigm by identifying concrete steps, as well as defining an indicative time frame for each implementable measure.

FES: *You were a young politician in charge of Albanian diplomacy. What is your experience of working with the new generation of Western Balkan diplomats? Are they well trained and skilled enough to help their countries play a greater role in international affairs? What is still missing?*

DB: I had very good relations with all my colleagues in other Western Balkan countries and not only them. All of them are very much up to the task. Professionally speaking, I think there are talented diplomats that have what it takes to tackle whatever diplomatic issue.

What is missing? International support and recognition. Promoting them internationally would be a very good way to enhance not only the visibility of our region, but also to encourage the younger generations of diplomats in our countries. They need role models also from their profession.

More courage from the diplomats themselves. They need to have the courage to be even "bigger than their country". This means especially, the ability to forge close and personal relations with other colleagues and diplomats from around the world. Diplomacy, just like most human activities, means human interaction and human understanding.

FES: *The Western Balkans continue to have an 'image problem' internationally. Are Western Balkan diplomacies doing enough about this problem and what more can be done?*

DB: A bad image comes quickly and leaves slowly. Internationally, we were seen from the prism of communism, the wars in former Yugoslavia, and their legacy. It is not easy to be seen in this light in a positive way.

Most of the bad image is connected to our countries' inability to make the best for ourselves and to unleash positive energy. We are the main reason why the image is still bad. However, stigma

fed by extremists in several EU Member States using the 'Balkans' as an instrument to advance their domestic agenda should be confronted too.

The improvement of the image is linked with a change that must come from inside. It must be real and tangible. At the same time, foreign services should improve the capability and skills to enable, facilitate and synchronize locally and communicate the changes.

The tools of the digital age create new issues and routines, and simultaneously redefine existing ones, in confronting the 'image problem'. Hybridity is the norm in the current media and diplomatic environments. In diplomacy, the balance between old and new forms of communication is different and appears not to reflect similar revolutionary changes.

The challenges posed by digital technologies will demand strategies dealing with the integration of 'online' and 'offline' environments. In their book, "The New Digital Age", Eric Schmidt, Chairman of Google, and Jared Cohen, argue that the revolution in communications technologies mean that governments will have to develop two general orientations, and two foreign policies, the online and the offline.

FES: What tools and resources can a country like Albania mobilize to reassure countries like the Netherlands or France to give Tirana a date for the start of its accession negotiations?

DB: Metaphorically speaking, Albania is collateral of the recent dispute between Bulgaria and North Macedonia for the start of the EU accession journey. This is putting into question not only the "regatta principle", which is one of the driving principles of the enlargement process, but also the credibility and predictability of the entire process.

The best way to face criticism on the enlargement process is to respond with determination to the EU revised enlargement methodology of 2020, whose main purpose was to re-establish a credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans and to make it very clear that enlargement is a key political project, which is firmly merit-based.

For those of us in Albania, the real challenge is how to improve the lives of citizens through the EU accession process. We know that by being who we are, Europeans in spirit and action, we want to be part of the EU and we will be part of it.

Considering the increase of domestic and international actors participating in diplomatic efforts and activities, the public has become more sensitive to foreign policy issues and seek to influence the diplomatic process through social media platforms and other means. The method of exchange between states, governments, and domestic actors has shifted and changed throughout the years, which has influenced the diplomatic process. The diplomats of today do not necessarily need the same attributes or skillsets that they needed in the past in order to participate in the diplomatic process.

SMALL STATES IN THE REGION: FROM INTUITIVE TOWARDS “SMART” DIPLOMACY

Vesko Garčević

Small States – “Lump of Weakness”?

From a legal point of view all sovereign states, great or small, are equal before the law. From a political stance however, they are far from being equal. The Berlin Congress (June-July 1878) is seen as one of the great milestones in Montenegrin state history. By revising the Treaty of San Stefano (March 1878), the big powers of Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Russia and the Ottoman Empire granted independence to Montenegro, Serbia and Romania. The Principality of Montenegro sent two representatives to Berlin, but they were not able to participate in the event.¹ The Congress reconfirmed that neither Montenegro, nor any other Balkan state at the time, could independently decide its future. Many changes that were introduced in Berlin were imposed on the regional actors.² The attitude of the great powers towards Montenegro, as one of the winning states in World War I, was also manifested during the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919. France opposed the invitation to the Montenegrin delegation and argued for recognition of the Podgorica Assembly.³

Deliberations in close circles among big powers have been a regular occurrence in global affairs. The composition of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the vested rights of the permanent members reinforces that stance. Isn't the history of international politics therefore the history of great powers? Following the same logic, one may conclude that “the strong would do as they could, and the weak would suffer what they must” (*Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War*).

Small states are often defined as a “lump of weakness,” which does not recognize their ability to exercise power, even if limited to specific issues, geographies, or relationships.

In the months preceding the referendum for inde-

1 Zivko Andrijasevic: *Montenegrin History*, Pobjeda, 2006.

2 Ibid l.

3 Ibid l.



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pendence in 2006, practitioners (particularly representatives of EU member states) and scholars alike, held the position that Montenegrin independence would not be an economically and politically viable project. This opinion comes from the deeply instilled view that equates smallness with weakness. It is common to believe that small states are vulnerable because of 1) their limited territory, natural and human resources; 2) their modest administrative capacity (the management of the state's policy operations and the stability of its decision-making); 3) and their high economic vulnerability. However, the lack of administrative cohesion and social stability that provide the conditions for long-term stable economic growth is not a function of size.⁴ How have things changed since the time of congress diplomacy was a dominant feature of European diplomacy in the 19th century?

Multilateralism Paved the Way for Small States – Our Region Made Some Success

With the creation of global or regional international organizations (IOs), small states have been empowered more than ever. The small and middle powers⁵ leaders realize that although they

4 Vaughan A. Lewis: *Studying Small States over the Twentieth into the Twenty-first Centuries; The Diplomacy of Small States: Between Vulnerability and Resilience* (Foreword); Palgrave Macmillan 2009, 2013.

5 Carsten Holbraad: *Middle Power in International Politics*, Palgrave Mcmillan, UK 1984.

may be able to do little together, they can do virtually nothing separately.⁶ Robert Rothstein therefore contends that “the status and prestige of small powers has risen, while their relative strength in the traditional elements of power has actually declined”.⁷

Liechtenstein, San Marino and Monaco can be used as examples. In 1920, Liechtenstein’s application for membership in the League of Nations was rejected because it had “chosen to depute to others some of the attributes of sovereignty” and had no army.⁸ Decades later, in 1990, Liechtenstein became the smallest UN Member, when there was a turn towards acceptance of micro-state claims to equal sovereignty within international society.⁹ San Marino joined the global organization in 1992, and Monaco followed in 1993.

A majority of states in today’s world are small states. More than 100 out of 193 UN members are small nations. Participation in the work of IOs may increase the administrative competence of smaller states. They can rely on the institutional knowledge of IOs, their expertise, information sharing and regulatory, normative mechanisms. The secretariats of IOs not only provide practical benefits to small states in the form of information, they can also serve as an avenue of influence.¹⁰

From 1991 to 2010, 25 states with a population of less than 5 million were elected to the UN Security Council (UNSC),¹¹ Bosnia and Herzegovina being one of them. It was also a non-permanent member of the UN in 2010 and 2011, a role that Albania is currently serving.¹² But, it was St. Vincent and Grenadines that broke the record as the smallest nation ever in UN history to be elected as a UNSC non-permanent member.¹³

More prominent roles for small states should not be limited only to the UN system, as regional organizations offer more opportunities to small states to occupy a leading role. The Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) is currently held by Slovenia. Likewise, the chairmanship of the Arctic Council is in the hands of Iceland, while Montenegro assumed the Presidency of the Central European Initiative in January 2021.

When Albania took over chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) during a challenging 2020, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama remarked that this role highlighted Albania’s significant transformation from a communist regime, which opposed the Helsinki spirit to a country that leads the same organization.¹⁴

These examples prove that small states, including countries from the region, can successfully coordinate complex systems such as the EU or the OSCE.

New multilateralism is a great opportunity for less powerful actors. In more restrictive environments, they have fewer foreign policy options and less successful outcomes. Such states aspire to join IOs in order to receive official approval and international recognition of their independ-

KEY TAKEAWAY

Small states, including those in the region of Southeast Europe, can successfully collaborate with complex systems such as the EU or the OSCE. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania were/are non-permanent members of the UN Security Council. Montenegro’s diplomatic achievements since its independence have exceeded expectations, yet their success is often the result of intuitive rather than well-planned diplomatic activities. Multilateralism opens avenues for small states in the global arena, which in order to play a relatively significant role, must develop “clever” diplomacy distinct from either “big” diplomacy with a heavy infrastructure, or “small” diplomacy, which may not have much of an infrastructure at all.

6 Robert O. Keohane: *Lilliputians’ Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics*, *International Organization*, 1969, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Spring, 1969), pp. 291–310; University of Wisconsin Press, MIT Press and Cambridge University Press.

7 Rothstein, Robert L.: *Alliances and Small Powers*, New York/London: Columbia University Press, 1968.

8 Michael M. Gunter: *Liechtenstein and the League of Nations: A Precedent for the UN’s Ministate Problem?*, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (Jul., 1974), pp. 496–501.

9 Los Angeles Times: *Principality of Lichtenstein becomes 160th, and the smallest, member of UN*, September 20, 1990.

10 Paul Novosad and Eric Werker: *Who runs the international system? Nationality and leadership in the United Nations Secretariat*, *The Review of International Organizations*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2019.

11 Baldur Thorhallsson: *Small States in the UN Security Council: Means of Influence?*, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 7, pp. 135–160, (2012).

12 The Dag Hammarskjöld Library, *Security Council Membership*, <https://research.un.org/en/unmembers/scmembers>.

13 *St. Vincent and the Grenadines breaks a record, as smallest ever Security Council seat holder*, UN News, June 7, 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/06/1040071>.

14 OSCE Chairmanship, OSCE Main Page, January 1, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/443215>.

ence and sovereignty.¹⁵ IOs and consensus based organizations like NATO or the OSCE in particular, appeal to small countries for at least three main reasons: 1) their formal equality; 2) the potential security of membership; and 3) the possible capacity of the organizations to restrain Great Powers.¹⁶

Greece's veto on North Macedonia's NATO membership at the NATO Summit in Bucharest 2008, despite US support of Macedonia, shows how a consensus-based organization (NATO in this case) can empower a relatively small nation.

Towards "Clever" Diplomacy

Multilateralism opens avenues for Lilliputians in the global arena, but to be able to play a relatively significant role, small states must develop "clever" diplomacy as distinct from either "big" diplomacy, with a heavy infrastructure, or "small" diplomacy, which may not have much infrastructure at all.¹⁷ Although small states are unable to field a large and diverse diplomatic force, which limits the skills and human resources that can be put into forming foreign policies and taking part in negotiations,¹⁸ they should nurture a functional and "focused" diplomacy. They should be ready to embrace a creative approach while avoiding the politicization of its diplomatic service. As we can learn from the regional experience, the politicization of diplomacy makes it dysfunctional, undermining its capacity to carry out complex diplomatic activities.

In practical terms, small countries from the region may consider the creation of "virtual/digital embassies" with "roving diplomats" that occasionally travel to states in which they "are posted". This may include outsourcing some activities to foreign or domestic experts and closer cooperation with international non-state actors that may be supportive of their agendas. Several influential think tanks and specialized non-governmental agencies from the US and Europe have given their unwavering support for Montenegro's inclusion in NATO. This support was not only helpful, but I would say necessary for Pod-

gorica to keep its membership bid alive despite waning enthusiasm towards enlargement.

In more strategic terms, clever diplomacy emphasizes individual distinctiveness and not only group inconspicuousness. Prioritizing efforts and focusing on policy sectors of great importance and/or where direct benefits can most likely be gained is an essential element. Needless to say, countries should first conceptualize how they may adjust to an ever-changing global system, define their regional and global interests, develop niche capabilities¹⁹ and/or comparative advantage, and ultimately outline a comprehensive strategy of how to translate it into creative diplomacy.

Montenegrin Diplomatic Success and "Intuitive" Diplomacy

Montenegro's diplomatic achievements since its independence have exceeded expectations, but its diplomacy is often intuitive,²⁰ rather than meticulously crafted. The strategic priority – the full integration of Euro-Atlantic structures – was defined at an early stage,²¹ which made the country's foreign policy look coherent. Montenegro acknowledged that a proactive regional agenda, involvement in regional initiatives, and its membership in other IOs will reaffirm its international recognition. Not only was its participation in the International Security Assistance Force Mission and the Resolute Support Mission seen as the way to show the country's solidarity with NATO members, but it also increased the country's outreach and allowed Podgorica to participate in the decision-making process reserved only for contributing states.

Yet, Montenegro has never drafted a comprehensive strategy about how to implement its strategic priorities or how to make the country's niche capabilities known to its foreign partners. For example, while it was obvious why NATO membership was essential for Montenegro (and the region as a whole), the country had not developed a convincing argument about its importance to the alliance. Montenegro was seen by

¹⁵ Ibid: IX.

¹⁶ Ibid: VI.

¹⁷ Alan K. Henrikson: *Ten types of small state diplomacy*.

¹⁸ Sverrir Steinsson and Baldur Thorhallsson: *Small State Foreign Policy*, The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, 2017 Oxford University Press.

¹⁹ For more: Alan K. Henrikson: *Ten types of small state diplomacy*.

²⁰ Intuitive diplomacy relies on a small number of experienced and knowledgeable individuals, their skills and initiative. While flexible in its nature, it is mostly responsive, short-term oriented, and often opportunistic.

²¹ Gordana Djurovic: *Montenegro's Strategic Priorities on the Path of Euro-Atlantic Integration*, The Partnership for Peace Consortium, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2009.

many members as an actor needing help rather than a partner with particular capabilities that the alliance needs.

The question of whether Montenegro (or any other small state) today has a better opportunity to control its future compared to the time when it was deemed too inconsequential to be included in the Berlin Congress deliberations is superfluous. While small states are certainly disadvantaged in the international system, they have never had more mechanisms at hand to improve

their standing in global affairs. Intuitive diplomacy can bring short-term success, but it can't guarantee lasting importance. Membership to IOs put small countries into the limelight, as it was the case with Bosnia and Herzegovina at the UNSC. The lack of strategy and incompetent diplomacy make a small state look passive and without ideas. If the countries of our region want to keep up with new trends, they have to create modern, professional, cost-effective, non-orthodox diplomacies. Sadly, none of them has embarked on a fundamental reform of its services.

INTERVIEW WITH VESNA PUSIĆ

FES: *How would you describe the state of diplomacy in the Western Balkans at the moment?*

VP: At the moment there is no diplomacy in the region. There is a number of reasons for that and I will mention here a few of them:

For years and even decades, the focus of diplomacy in all Western Balkan (WB) countries has been accession to the EU, and for some also to NATO. Up until this point, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania have joined NATO. Of the remaining three, only Kosovo aspires unequivocally to NATO membership but at the moment is still facing more existential, fundamental issues regarding its full international recognition, UN membership, and basic security. Serbia doesn't want to join NATO, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is torn between two opposing positions. As for the EU, the main objective for all of the WB countries – accession, seems to be disappearing into a distant future. So in some way, regional diplomacy has lost its cause and focus.

Another reason is that in the WB, for all practical purposes, the prime ministers or presidents have taken the role of foreign ministers. Although that might seem like giving foreign policy more prominence, it has actually eliminated all the back channels, personal below-the-radar relations, preliminary negotiations, exploratory meetings and all the other usual tools of diplomacy.

Lastly, the EU and other foreign actors are dealing with the WB countries almost exclusively on the



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ambassadorial level, meaning that the communication mostly runs between foreign ambassadors and Prime Ministers and Presidents of the WB countries. That results in local politicians mostly posturing, rather than getting involved in finding diplomatic solutions.

FES: *At the time you were Minister of Foreign Affairs, what were the greatest challenges for regional diplomacy and how did you cope with them?*

VP: During my tenure as Foreign Minister there were six key issues on the regional diplomatic agenda:

- Countries joining the EU (Croatia), or getting candidate status and starting negotiations, or, in the case of BiH, being allowed to submit the request for candidacy;

- Countries joining NATO (Montenegro, BiH, North Macedonia), where North Macedonia was being held back by the so-called “name issue”;
- Stabilization and future of BiH and the role of Croatia and Serbia in that process;
- Improving and re-framing relations between Croatia and Serbia;
- Finding a solution for the Serbia-Kosovo relations;
- The refugee crisis of 2015.

Croatian diplomacy was involved in all of these issues. As the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, I personally worked on all of them together with diplomats from the Ministry, parliamentarians and other members of the government. The key issues were:

- Croatia joining the EU – The Accession Agreement, signed in December 2011 needed to be ratified in 27 countries by the end of June 2013. With a small group of parliamentarians I visited parliaments of all EU member states and managed to negotiate with the Slovenian Foreign Minister a solution that opened the way for the Slovenian Parliament to ratify the agreement in spite of a still pending territorial dispute.
- BiH submitting its membership application to the EU – In close collaboration with a group of Croatian diplomats, we designed a possible new approach for the EU towards this issue. We managed to persuade the UK and German Foreign Ministers to adopt the approach and present it to the EU Foreign Affairs Council. The EU adopted it and as a result, BiH was able to submit its candidacy in early 2016.
- NATO membership – Worked very actively on facilitating negotiations for membership, especially in the case of Montenegro;
- Bosnia and Herzegovina – Engaged with all the political actors in BiH, plus with Serbia and Turkey who played an active part in the country. Organized a global Croatia Forum on the issue of stability in the region.
- Croatia – Serbia relations – Engaged with Serbia in solving a number of practical issues af-

fecting the everyday lives of people by giving Serbia a Croatian translation of the EU *acquis communautaire* and assisting it in its accession process through the Center of Excellence, established at the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I was one of the only two EU foreign ministers present at the opening of Serbia’s EU accession negotiations.

- Serbia – Kosovo relations – Actively worked on EU reforms with the governments of Serbia and Kosovo and put Croatian documents, useful experience and experts at their disposal. We managed also to facilitate a meeting between the presidents of Serbia and Kosovo on the margins of the Croatia Forum in 2014.
- Refugee crisis – In close cooperation with the Croatian Ministry of Internal Affairs (Police), we organized an orderly and humane management of the refugee crisis, where in the three last months of 2015 more than 450,000 refugees came through Croatia (roughly 12 % of the entire Croatian population). The treatment of refugees made Croatia, together with Germany and Sweden, one of the only three EU countries with an impeccable human rights record in dealing with this crisis.

FES: *In your view, what are the diplomatic capacities within the region to position this part of Europe more significantly?*

VP: There are diplomatic capacities within the region, but unfortunately, they are at the moment, in most cases, not tied to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. For the reasons I have already touched upon, diplomacy in the region has been stunted. I myself am involved with an informal group of former ministers from the region. There are a few think-tanks dealing with foreign policy and diplomacy. There is a great need for fresh ideas and a new positioning of the region. Unfortunately, there is very little coordination and synergy among the existing initiatives.

FES: *In comparison with today, what were the strengths and weaknesses of Yugoslav diplomacy?*

VP: Books have been written and will be written on this topic. The most obvious differences are that Yugoslavia had a professional diplomatic corps and an articulated foreign policy, which corresponded with its interests and international position. Yugoslavia was also in its time an impor-

tant regional and even global player, and used a historic opportunity to establish, together with its partners, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which made it an important player both on the global scene and in key multilateral organizations. Indeed, Yugoslavia succeeded in achieving the main objective of a successful foreign policy – to make its influence and importance greater than its size and economic strength.

Of course, all that can be said about Yugoslav foreign policy during the twenty years between roughly mid-1950s and early 1970s. After that, Yugoslav foreign policy started disappearing and was mainly surviving on “old glory”.

None of this has yet been achieved by any of the countries of the region. Of course, times, circumstances, and sizes have changed, but even taking all of that into account, there is no country in the region today that plays a significant foreign policy and diplomatic role.

FES: Do you see a skilled, well prepared young generation of diplomats in the region now? What is missing and where does the region have some advantages?

VP: There are many talented, well prepared and professional young people in the region who could make excellent diplomats. Some of them even work in the foreign ministries. However, ‘partitocracy’, nepotism and corruption have made a diplomatic career out of reach for most of them. There has been a considerable backsliding in that respect in recent years. Also, there is no specialized, focused training for that profession, not enough think-tanks and academic institutions working on foreign policy and international relations.

What is missing is definitely a livelier, more intense communication among the countries of the region, both those inside and outside of the EU. Moreover, all the still existing expansionist aspirations towards respective neighbors have to be firmly put behind us. This would lead to a better understanding of some common foreign policy interests and joint political responsibility for the region’s future. The greatest advantage is the fact that almost all countries of the region speak roughly the same language and share a common political and institutional history. That provides excellent grounds for changing the current breakdown in communication and hostile posturing.

WHAT IT TAKES TO BECOME A GOOD DIPLOMAT: TWO CENTS FOR EMERGING PROFESSIONALS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Jasmin Hasić

“Diplomatic work begins with doubt, but is always resolutely fixed on fulfilling the set goals and interests, which are either based on beliefs, needs, or desires to resolve an ongoing issue.”

As in other lines of business, in diplomacy, one looks for three qualities: intelligence, engagement, and representativeness. However, all three rarely appear in confluence. Opportunities to enter into a diplomatic profession in the Western Balkans are not solely dependent on one’s abilities, academic merits, or experience, but are often entangled with their exposure to relevant networks, pre-existing professional ties, and various cultural practices of informalities. The profiles of those who want to become career diplomats are fairly diverse, but more often than not, insufficiently strong for establishing meaning-



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ful connections with real people and/or events, understanding many available forms of cooperation, recognizing opportunities for action, or being firmly grounded in the mission of the in-

stitution that a young diplomat is supposed to represent.

Diplomatic training in the Western Balkans has been slowly integrated into the overall diplomatic agenda of each WB6 political party, and the constant evolution of skills and competencies among young diplomats has become more important to those who want to maintain their strategic positions in various regional and international fora. However, available post-graduate professional training for young and emerging diplomats in the region is still limited both in scope and quality. There is much to be done individually, and honing the skills needed for getting the job is never an easy task. If one is successfully admitted, s/he can only rely on their own skills and a very imperfect system of engagement, which progresses gradually and has almost no points for 'disruption'.

Obviously, there is no formula for emerging young diplomats to absorb the craft overnight, or a menu or toolbox from which to choose the most suitable solutions for any given problem one might encounter in their line of work. Not everything depends on the pre-existing qualities young professionals bring to the table, and not everything can be learned from the materials they received during their diplomatic training. This type of professional development requires solid knowledge and pre-existing skills, as well as careful and steady nurturing by more experienced colleagues, especially in regard to deciding how to appropriately respond to new challenges.

There are a few virtues worth exploring and considering when discussing the essential diplomatic skills young people need to bring into their new jobs and how they relate to the 'art' itself. At the outset, it is important to know that any and all diplomatic engagements always begin with doubt, but are resolutely fixed on fulfilling the set goals and interests, which are either based on beliefs, needs, or desires to resolve ongoing issues. The work itself often relies on a limited set of information and their modest exchange, the ability to engage in examining all alternative options, and less on conformity or application of firm doctrines. The end goal of any such action has to be eventually proven worth to citizens' needs and welfare, but rarely situated in the vacuum of close public scrutiny, which might jeopardize the existing arrangement.

Modern diplomatic systems have been compactly integrated into the overall governance systems of any given country in the Western Balkans. Diplomats' need to act within the scope of their formal duty, through applying professional discipline and skills nested in diplomats' own commitments to results and goals. They also need to be able to recognize new paradigms or practices that advance the professional opportunities they could potentially pursue. The melding of these externalized impacts significantly alters young diplomats' sense of responsibility toward their professional goals.

On top of this, young diplomats need to be aware of a wide range of interests being put forward. They need to act and react to them simultaneously and effectively, while keeping their professional development and integrity in check. The conflict between interests and values may often appear as false, and over time it becomes easy to accept these might be interdependent. However, effective management of the two is crucial and has to be done in relation to building confidence and influence necessary for the support of the basic goals a diplomat is entrusted with.

Diplomatic practice is, habitually, interrelated with predictability and assurance the other side will honor their commitment. It also depends on the ability to anticipate and being prepared to react to swiftly evolving events that might result in undesirable outcomes. This needs to be coupled with excellent reporting abilities to conduct a solid assessment of the likelihood of a process emerging and being successfully sustained. Delivering policies is thus result-based, and not event-based, and it mostly rests with the team, and not solely on those engaged in finding problem's resolution. This is why all members of the diplomatic mission involved should build confidence in their abilities to make responsible decisions on ground, and be prepared to know on how to proceed in any given situation, without being constrained or contradicted by parallel messaging or a lack of external support.

As much as it can become difficult to react without clear instructions, and given that timeframes are often unpredictable and short, young diplomats should also work on developing their capabilities to adapt to local conditions, and their variations. In this context, their ability in making the connections is equally important. Applying open fashion methods, "rubbing shoulders"

with officials, as well as with non-state agencies, is practically unavoidable nowadays. Listening skills and practical understanding of the culture, psychology and the overall mentality of their counterparts is immensely important. Constant interaction with colleagues, counterparts, locals, and civil society should, in practice, expand their own 'narrow confines'. They should, of course, always keep in mind the international norms, which limit diplomatic practice and interfere with internal affairs. Because of that, young diplomats need to advance their interpersonal skills and consciously represent their countries beyond traditional government-to-government communication schemes. They need to expand the qualities and applications of the reputation their countries enjoy, and invoke positive practices that encourage their interlocutors to build more pluralistic and transparent relations.

Indeed, there is no formula or a toolbox for young diplomats which is applicable to all the potential professional situations they might find themselves in. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that young diplomats in the Western Balkans often rely on a very limited set of information, which significantly affects their ability to adequately examine the problems or alternative options, or to propose solutions. As a result, they gravitate toward formalized approaches to their professional duties and event-based results, which in time further limits their ability to recognize new paradigms and impedes their creative thinking in applying skills needed to fulfill their commitments. Shifting the working pattern toward result-based performances is the most difficult task, and this is why young diplomats should primarily work on building confidence in their abilities to take responsible decisions on ground, and be ready to know on how to proceed in any given situation, without being constrained by a lack of external support.

A blue-tinted photograph of a textured wall. In the upper left, there is a simple black silhouette of a bird in flight. In the lower right, there is a larger, more intricate black silhouette of a bird, possibly a phoenix or a similar mythical creature, with detailed patterns on its wings and tail. The background is a light blue, textured surface, possibly concrete or stone, with some shadows and highlights. The overall mood is artistic and symbolic.

POLITICAL TRENDS & DYNAMICS

OVERVIEW

THIS SECTION AIMS TO PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS AND UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN SECURITY, WHICH INCLUDES STRUCTURAL SOURCES OF CONFLICT SUCH AS SOCIAL TENSIONS BROUGHT ABOUT BY UNFINISHED DEMOCRATIZATION, SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES OR ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES, FOR INSTANCE. THE BRIEFINGS COVER FOURTEEN COUNTRIES IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE: THE SEVEN POST-YUGOSLAV COUNTRIES, ALBANIA, GREECE, TURKEY, CYPRUS, BULGARIA, ROMANIA, AND MOLDOVA.

DANGEROUSLY ADRIFT?

The consequences of international neglect are becoming increasingly visible across much of the Balkans. Over the summer, the region has shown signs of dangerous instability.

The political and security situation remains most volatile in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. All three are deeply divided and polarized along ethno-nationalist lines, with the risk of seemingly mundane events or decisions sparking violence or a potentially violent stand-off. Few could have expected that the enthronement of an Orthodox bishop in Montenegro at the end of the summer would be used to stoke nationalist tensions, let alone bring about the spectre of burning barricades in part of the country. In Kosovo, an administrative decision about Serbian license plates generated a tense stand-off lasting almost two weeks, which saw Kosovar special police units being deployed to the north of Kosovo – facing off local Serbs across barricades, while Serbia scrambled fighter jets above its border with Kosovo.

Meanwhile, Bosnia seemed to sink ever deeper into political and security quicksand. After outgoing High Representative Valentin Inzko imposed a decision to criminalise denial of genocide as his parting move, Bosnian Serb elected representatives – ruling and opposition – began a boycott of all State-level institutions. Even worse, Bosnian Serb leader and State Presidency member Milorad Dodik threatened to take back competences transferred to the Bosnian state from the entities in the past, risking political and administrative chaos within the country. Talk of

High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Christian Schmidt, speaks at the House of Representatives of the Federation of BiH in Sarajevo



'war' and state collapse has now crept into public discourse.

For many observers of the region, one of the key questions is whether the international community has a plan for stemming the growth of tensions in the region and preventing localised political 'fires' from turning into regional 'wildfires'. As of August, Bosnia has a new High Representative in the form of Christian Schmidt. However, his mandate remains contested and it is unclear how much of a free hand he will have to intervene in Bosnia's destructive domestic political dynamics. Meanwhile, the Biden Administration has also been making new appointments in the region. At the beginning of September, Gabriel Escobar was appointed US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Central Europe. The State Department's new regional envoy has extensive experience in the region, having until recently been the Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Belgrade but also – and more importantly – having completed several tours of duty in the region since 1998. In mid-October, it was also announced that the Biden Administration was bringing Christopher Hill, another veteran State Department official in the region, out of retirement to become the new ambassador in Belgrade, subject to approval by the US Congress. This appointment gained particular interest among observers of the region, particularly given Hill's central role in the negotiations over the future of Kosovo prior to the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. Finally, another veteran US diplomat of the region, Matthew Palmer, has been appointed Special Envoy for electoral reform in Bosnia.

Many of the regional diplomatic 'chess pieces' are now in place. The next few months could prove a real test of the state of diplomacy and diplomatic abilities in the region.

ELECTIONS: BETWEEN CLOUD AND CLARITY

While Bulgaria heads for its third Parliamentary elections this year after the first two races delivered fragmented Parliaments incapable of electing governments, Moldovan voters gave a very clear signal of who they want to govern them. Meanwhile, local elections in several corners of

the region are testing the stability of national governments, in some cases fatally.

Bulgarians went to the polls to elect a new parliament for the second – but not the last – time this year on July 11th. After it successfully came second in the April parliamentary elections, the big-tent, populist party 'There is Such a Nation' (ITN) – founded only in 2020 by Bulgarian singer and TV host Slavi Trifonov – rode into first place in this election with 23.78% of votes cast and 65 seats in the new Parliament. This marked a significant improvement in its performance compared to April's election, when it won 17.4% of the votes and 51 seats. Meanwhile, ITN's success pushed the formerly ruling GERB into second place with 23.2% of votes and 63 seats (down from 25.8% of votes and 75 seats in April), while the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) remained more or less steady with 13.2% of votes and 36 seats. The reformist, pro-European Democratic Bulgaria increased its vote share from 9.3% in April to 12.5% in July, winning 34 seats, while another small, relatively new grouping Stand Up.BG! We are coming! remained almost unchanged on 4.9% of votes and 12 seats. Despite the small changes in vote share and number of seats won by the respective camps, the repeated elections did not deliver any substantive change. As first placed, ITN had the opportunity to try to form a government first. The group opted to try to form a minority government, yet with little tact or consultation with parties who could realistically support such a government. Amidst criticism by other Parliamentary parties of its approach to proposed ministerial appointments, ITN declared that it had abandoned its attempt to form a government by August 10th. GERB was then given the chance to form a government – which again proved unsuccessful, as did an attempt by the BSP. With all possibilities to form a new government exhausted by early September, President Rumen Radev scheduled a '2 in 1' presidential and parliamentary election for November 14th. Radev has the support of the BSP, ITN and several smaller parties and a strong lead over all his rivals according to the latest polls, with polling data showing support for him running from 42.6% in the least favourable poll to 60.4% in the most favourable. By contrast, support for his closest challenger, GERB-backed Anastas Gerdzhikov, is anywhere between 21.8% and 28.1% according to different polls. Meanwhile, polling for the Parlia-

mentary elections suggests that support for ITN has fallen away sharply, with the possibility that the group could be pushed into third – or even fourth – place behind GERB and the BSP.

Unlike Bulgarian voters, **Moldovans** expressed a more than clear preference as to who they would like to govern them over the next four years in Parliamentary elections also held on July 11th. The Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) won a thumping 52.8% of the votes cast in the elections, along with 63 seats in the 101 seat Parliament. In doing so, PAS more than doubled both its vote share and seat tally compared to the 2019 Parliamentary elections, when it ran in coalition with another reformist party. The Electoral Bloc of Communists and Socialists came second with 27.2% of votes and 32 seats, while the Sor Party was the only other group to squeeze into Parliament with 5.7% of votes and 6 seats. This was the first time that a single party had won a majority of seats in Moldova since 2009 and the first time a party had won an absolute majority of votes since 2001. With such a clear mandate to govern, a new cabinet was sworn into power under PAS' Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilita on August 6th.

Local elections were held across **Kosovo** on October 17th, serving as an important test of support for political parties, particularly the ruling Vetëvendosje (VV), which won a landslide victory in the February 14th Parliamentary elections. Given the strong mandate that voters gave it to govern at the beginning of the year, the outcome of the first round of local elections must have been quite a shock for VV. Of Kosovo's 38 municipalities, 17 elected mayors in the first round of voting, but not a single one came from the ranks of VV. Its candidates will now go into the second round in 12 municipalities, with a strong chance of winning in the biggest cities in Kosovo, such as Pristina, Gjilan/Gnjilane and Prizren. Some analysts argue that the ruling party's weak performance is down to a poor choice of candidates at the local level, as well as disappointment with its relative lack of results at the national level since coming to power. Meanwhile, all the main opposition parties, in particular the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) could be relatively pleased with their performance after February's rout, with signs of support beginning to recover.

Voters in **North Macedonia** also went to the polls to elect their local governments on October 17th. The result was also a blow for the ruling SDSM. Official results from the first round of voting show that the SDSM won around 240,000 votes, being beaten into second place by the VMRO-DPMNE which won around 286,000 votes. In reality, neither of the two parties has much to celebrate. While the VMRO-DPMNE is first in terms of overall votes, its tally is still some 50,000 votes less than it won in the 2017 local elections and 29,000 votes less than it won in the 2020 Parliamentary elections. Yet this still compared favourably to the SDSM – the ruling party lost around 180,000 votes compared to the 2017 local elections and 87,000 votes compared to the 2020 Parliamentary elections. In part, the SDSM seems to have suffered because it chose to anchor its campaign not so much around local issues as national ones. This seems to have been a double mistake. Ever since coming to power, the SDSM has been consistently shedding votes primarily because of the huge gap between the expectation of its supporters and what it has actually delivered since coming to power, particularly on the domestic front. In a final blow to the ruling SDSM, the party suffered defeat in a number of races in the second round of local elections held on October 31st, losing the mayorship of the capital Skopje among other places. As the scale of the SDSM's losses began to sink in – and amidst plotting to overthrow his government – Prime Minister Zoran Zaev resigned as Prime Minister and SDSM party leader in the evening of October 31st. Still, afterwards Zaev said that he will stay on in the job until the political situation in the country stabilizes. Zaev made the announcement late on November 9 following

Ballot boxes at a polling station are seen as North Macedonians cast their votes for the second round of local elections to elect 45 mayors



a meeting of his SDSM leadership, after opposition parties led by the right-wing VMRO-DPMNE filed a no-confidence motion in the government.

Looking ahead, **Kosovo** will hold the second round of mayoral elections in the first half of November, another major opportunity for ruling and opposition parties to test their strength vis-à-vis each other, particularly in the race for mayorships of some of the largest cities in Kosovo. **Montenegro** will hold local election in the municipalities of Cetinje, Mojkovac and Petnjica on December 5th. The elections could, yet again, cause a spike in tensions, and will be an important test of support for the formerly ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) in what have traditionally been the party's strongholds. Yet the local elections will also be an important test of popular support for United Reform Action (URA), the smallest of the three blocks in the ruling coalition, ahead of talks on how to restructure the current ruling coalition. If URA does well, it will have a stronger hand to play in the coalition negotiations, including using the threat of early elections; if it does poorly, its coalition partners (or, perhaps better said rivals) will have the upper hand. Further ahead, April 3 appears to be crystalizing as the date for the holding of presidential, parliamentary and Belgrade City elections in **Serbia**.

GOVERNMENT RISE, SHAKE, AND FALL

While Albania gets another seemingly stable government, a sitting government is suddenly toppled in Romania. Meanwhile, governments in Montenegro and Bosnia are showing chronic signs of instability, while North Macedonia's ruling coalition also looks more vulnerable than ever.

After winning a solid majority in April's Parliamentary elections – 74 out of 140 seats – **Albania's** new-old Prime Minister Edi Rama finally presented the line-up of his new government at the beginning of September. The headline-grabbing news was that women would hold a majority of ministerial posts in the third Rama cabinet. Yet in reality, the new Rama cabinet was very much one of continuity rather than change. Rama took the opportunity to announce his new government's composition during a Social-

ist Party's congress on September 2nd. In a demonstration of his unchallenged power, it seemed that this was also the first time that many ministers from the previous Rama cabinet, as well as new appointments, found out whether they would be in the next government or not. While little change is to be expected from the election of the new government, a positive development is nevertheless the return of opposition parties to Parliament. This should bring to a close a destabilizing period in which the opposition had resigned its seats in Parliament, moving the centre of gravity of political competition from Parliament to the streets, with opposition parties organizing (often violent) protests on and off.

The **Romanian** government of Prime Minister Florin Cîțu of the National Liberal Party (PNL) suffered a vote of no confidence on October 5th. The collapse of the government came after Prime Minister Cîțu decided to sack Justice Minister Stelian Ion, a member of the Save Romania Union (USR), one of PNL's junior partners in the governing coalition. In retaliation, the USR decided to support a motion of no confidence tabled by the opposition Social Democratic Party (PSD). What happens next is far from clear. Initially, on October 11th, President Klaus Iohannis nominated USR's president Dacian Cioloș as a candidate Prime Minister to form the next government. As expected, Cioloș failed to find a majority for his government, prompting President Iohannis to make another nomination, this time in the person of Nicolae Ciucă, the incumbent Defence Minister. On November 2nd Nicolae Ciucă decided to depose his mandate as designated Prime Minister, in recognition of the stalemate on the Romanian political scene. The National-Liberals are confronted with very limited options if they want to stay in power and avoid the dreaded scenario of early elections: they have yet to decide whether to mend their relations with the former coalition partners from USR or form a grand coalition with the Social Democrats. Neither of which is easy, given the amount of damage in the PNL-USR relations over the last two months and, respectively, the open hostility PNL has long displayed against PSD. In their turn, the Social Democrats have signaled willingness to enter a government coalition with PNL, as the country is in bad shape, amidst a serious health and social crisis in the fourth pandemic wave, and urgently needs a government with full powers.

Over in **Montenegro**, crisis and paralysis seem to be the normal state of being for the government of Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapić. In reality, the Krivokapić Government came into existence unstable, following disagreements between the three blocks which back it – For the Future of Montenegro (ZBCG), the Democrats and URA – over whether the government should be technocratic or political in nature back in late 2020. The ZBCG coalition, in particular the Democratic Front (DF), only very reluctantly accepted a technocratic government, from which its own representatives were largely excluded. Not surprisingly, during the first half of the year the DF usually found itself at loggerheads with its own government, before finally walking out of Parliament and beginning a boycott in June this year. By the beginning of the summer, it was apparent that either some kind of government reshuffle or fresh elections were on the cards before the end of the year. Yet the drama over the enthronement of Metropolitan Joanikije, the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, which came to a head at the beginning of September (see below) changed the dynamics within the ruling Montenegrin coalition. Whereas previously the DF had been at loggerheads with Krivokapić, the Democrats and URA and the (mis)handling of security arrangements surrounding the enthronement resulted in demands from Krivokapić, the DF and Democrats for the resignation of the Minister of Interior and head of police, both URA appointees. For the time being, Krivokapić, the DF and Democrats find themselves aligned on one side of the governing block in their demands for a government reshuffle, with URA holding out on the other side. Given that URA has emerged politically weakened after the violent standoff over the Metropolitan's enthronement, its bargaining position within the ruling coalition is also weaker. Negotiations on the government reshuffle seem to have stalled and are only likely to resume with intensity after the December 5th local elections.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is another country that is no stranger to government paralysis and deadlock, yet over the summer months it began a descent into a whole new level of crisis which has still not been halted. It all began on July 23rd, when the departing head of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), Valentin Inzko, im-

posed changes to the country's criminal code in effect criminalising genocide denial. This is a particularly sensitive issue due to internal disagreements within Bosnia over whether the massacres committed by Bosnian Serb forces in Srebrenica in 1995 constituted an act of genocide or not. Both the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have handed down rulings which deemed that genocide was indeed committed in Srebrenica. While Bosniak leaders and the public applauded Inzko's decision as long overdue, Bosnian Serb leaders and much of the public were left angry, given that most of them contest the verdicts handed down by the ICTY and ICJ relating to whether the Srebrenica massacres constituted genocide. In response, Bosnian Serb political parties – ruling and opposition – began a boycott of state-level institutions, paralysing decision making at the State level. Since then, the situation has deteriorated further, with Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik threatening to take back competencies transferred from the entities to the State level as part of – what Dodik describes as – his attempt to 'reset' Bosnia back to the original Dayton Peace Agreements. This has put the country on an internal collision course. Not only does the RS Parliament not have the legal powers to take back competencies already transferred to the central state level in most cases, but neither the international community nor Bosniak political representatives are likely to allow this to happen. Yet attempts to withdraw the RS from important state institutions, such as the Indirect Taxation Authority, have the potential to create

internal chaos within Bosnia's system of government and tax administration. Worse still, discussion of civil war – with different political leaders even discussing how war could break out – have crept into public discourse.

SECURITY

The security situation in the region has become unusually tense and fragile over the last few months, demonstrating how quickly events have the potential to spin out of control.

Montenegrin politics is usually in the deep shade during August, when the country's tourist season is at its height. Yet this summer was different. At the beginning of August, the Serbian Orthodox Church announced that Metropolitan Joanikije, its most senior bishop in Montenegro, would be enthroned in Cetinje Monastery, the historic seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, at the beginning of September. The announcement caused genuine resentment among many residents of Cetinje, a stronghold of Montenegrin nationalists and pro-Montenegrin political parties such as the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS). The DPS and its political allies saw in the religious ceremony a good opportunity to fire up and mobilise their own pro-Montenegrin support base. The enthronement was, variously, cast as an affront to Montenegrin identity and history, or 'the crowning moment of Greater Serbian assaults on Montenegro'. By mid-August, the DPS had announced the holding of a rally in Cetinje and vowed to block the Metropolitan's enthronement. In an op-ed, Veselin Veljović, the former police chief and now adviser to President Milo Đukanović, issued what amounted to a call to mutiny by the police, suggesting they should refuse any orders to use force against demonstrators. By August 28, President Đukanović himself declared that he would attend the DPS rally against the enthronement in order to defend the 'honour and dignity' of Montenegro. Meanwhile, the Krivokapić Government seemed to lack a decisive response. Keen to avoid a confrontation between police and pro-Montenegrin demonstrators, URA officials seemed to be pushing for the enthronement to be moved elsewhere. However, Krivokapić, the DF and Democrats pushed hard for the ceremony to go ahead. After demonstrators organized by the DPS erect-

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2nd L) meets Željko Komšić (2nd R), the Croat member and current chair of the three-member Presidency Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosniak member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidential Council Šefik Džaferović (R) and Serb member of member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidential Council Milorad Dodik (L) in Sarajevo



ed burning barricades on the road to Cetinje, police were finally deployed to break them up during the night between September 4th and 5th. In Cetinje, running battles were fought between demonstrators and hooligan groups on the one hand and police. At one point, Veljović himself charged at a police cordon before being arrested. While the enthronement eventually went ahead, the violence which sprang up around it brought the whole of Montenegro to the brink of a wider conflagration between the pro-Serb and pro-Montenegrin camps in the country.

Meanwhile, on August 27th, **Montenegrin** police seized 1.4 tonnes of cocaine hidden in a shipment of bananas near the capital Podgorica. The drug bust was reported to be the biggest in the country's history and a major blow to organized crime groups not just in Montenegro, but the region.

Two tense stand-offs took place in north **Kosovo** in September and October. The first, and more protracted crisis, was sparked by a decision of the Government in Pristina on September 20th to ban the use of Serbian licence plates in Kosovo, which would have to be replaced with temporary licence plates when driving in Kosovo. Pristina billed the decision as a reciprocity measure, as Serbia required Kosovo cars to use temporary plates in Serbia. Yet the decision not only affected drivers from Serbia, but also Kosovo Serb drivers in north Kosovo, most of whom still use Serbian-issued licence plates. Even worse, it left them with no solution to re-register their cars with Kosovo licence plates. On September 20th, Pristina also deployed special police units with armoured vehicles to two northern border crossings be-

tween Serbia and Kosovo to help enforce the decision. Meanwhile, local Kosovo Serbs erected their own barricades and began protests at the Kosovo Government decision. A tense stand-off ensued, in which Kosovo police special units found themselves sandwiched between the Serbian border (and Serbian police and army units) and Kosovo Serb barricades. The atmosphere became even more heated on September 23rd when three Kosovo Serbs uninvolved in the protests were allegedly attacked and injured by Kosovo police near the border crossings, while on September 25th two official Kosovo Government registration centres in the northern Serb towns of Zvečan and Zubin Potok were attacked by arsonists. The same day, Serbian fighter jets flew along the border with Kosovo, while the Serbian army also moved hardware into the border area. In the end, the crisis was only defused after EU mediation, with a deal struck on September 30th, whereby Belgrade and Pristina would respect the use of each other's license plates, but with stickers being placed over state symbols of Serbia on cars crossing into Kosovo or Kosovo symbols on the plates of cars crossing into Serbia. However, the deal is intended to be temporary and last for six months, until a final solution is hammered out.

No sooner had this crisis been defused than a new one broke out several weeks later, albeit lasting only a day. On October 13th, **Kosovo** police and law enforcement authorities carried out an anti-smuggling operation across Kosovo. Among the targets was a pharmacy suspected of selling smuggled medicines in Serb-dominated North Mitrovica. As police attempted to carry out the operation, local Serbs gathered in protest. Soon, special police units were again deployed to the north, leading to brief but violent skirmishes. Rounds of live ammunition were also reported to have been fired. Although short, the violent stand-off was intense, while also demonstrating just how fragile the security situation in north Kosovo remained.

At the other end of the region, on October 10th two Turkish police officers were killed inside **Syria** when Kurdish YPG militants attacked them with a guided missile. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan referred to the attack as the 'final straw'. Ankara subsequently threatened further military action against armed US-backed Kurdish militants in Syria unless such attacks were stopped.

A view from the road to the Jarinjë and Bërnjak border crossings on the Serbian border in the north of Kosovo as roads guarded by special units of the Kosovo police during continuing protests, in Jarinjë, Kosovo



EU PROGRESS?

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel's trip to the Western Balkans region, after 16 years of chancellorship, began in September in Belgrade. Later Merkel headed up to Tirana. The focus of the meetings with the leaders of the Western Balkans six was the political and economic cooperation and the EU integration process.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić hold a joint press conference after their meeting in Belgrade



Merkel emphasized that the Berlin Process hasn't failed, but there's still a lot to be done. Concretely, as she noted, the lack of rule of law and competence to varying degrees are widespread, corruption and nepotism are rampant, and independent media and critical civil associations are coming under increasing pressure. She also pinpointed that the Berlin Process is not a substitute for European membership for the countries in the region being at different stages of EU integration, but rather a preparation to make the countries ready for full membership.

Her visit came ahead of the EU-Balkans summit under the Slovenian presidency in October. Hosted by the Slovenian presidency of the Council in Brdo pri Kranju, the EU-Western Balkans summit on the 6th of October brought together leaders from the EU member states and the six Western Balkans countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia and Kosovo. During the summit, EU leaders adopted a declaration, with which the Western Balkans leaders have aligned themselves. The **declaration** reaffirmed the EU's unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans, but there was no com-

Prime Minister of North Macedonia Zoran Zaev attends the EU-Western Balkans summit at Brdo Congress Centre, in Brdo pri Kranju, in Kranj, Slovenia



mitment to a solid timeline for the six countries to join the 27-member bloc.

On October 19th, the EU published its progress reports on the six Western Balkan accession hopefuls and Turkey, the longest-running accession candidate.

The reports made for mixed reading. The European Commission once again reaffirmed that **Albania** and **North Macedonia** were ready to begin accession negotiations. Skopje was commended for making solid progress in key areas such as rule of law, the fight against organized crime, freedom of speech and strengthening democracy, while being criticized for the slow pace of judicial reforms. Tirana was commended for making progress in reforming the judiciary and fighting corruption, but problems relating to freedom of speech were highlighted, as well as noting that more needed to be done to improve dialogue between ruling and opposition parties.

The reports were more mixed when it comes to **Montenegro** and **Serbia**, two countries which have already begun accession negotiations. The Commission noted that disagreements between the Krivokapić Government and ruling majority in Parliament have slowed reforms in the country, particularly when it comes to rule of law, judicial reforms and fundamental rights. Meanwhile, in the case of Serbia, the Commission recommended deepening accession talks with the opening of negotiations on two 'clusters' of chapters – Cluster 3 on social policy and employment and Cluster 4 on energy. Yet when it comes

to actual progress made with existing reforms, the Progress report is distinctly lukewarm.

Accession negotiations with **Turkey** to all extents and purposes remain on hold. The Commission's Progress report on Turkey noted that Ankara remained a key EU partner in the fields of migration, counter-terrorism, economy and trade, as well as the 'dialogue and cooperation' between the EU and Turkey had increased during the course of 2021. However, it also notes that neither the question of fundamental rights in Turkey nor the independence of the judiciary had been credibly addressed.

Meanwhile, **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Kosovo** remain far off from even opening accession negotiations. Indeed, Bosnia's progress report seemed to be the least flattering of all. The Commission noted that 'in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the strategic goal of EU integration has not been turned into concrete action'. When it comes to Kosovo, the Commission observed that most of the previous reporting period – June 2020 to June 2021 – had been marked by major political instability, though the elections of February 2021 had at least delivered a stable governing majority, which, in principle, could carry out key reforms. The Commission again noted that Kosovo was ready for the implementation of EU visa liberalization, which remained stuck in the European Council.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Southeast Europe

After more than two decades of engagement in southeastern Europe, the FES appreciates that the challenges and problems still facing this region can best be resolved through a shared regional framework. Our commitment to advancing our core interests in democratic consolidation, social and economic justice and peace through regional cooperation, has since 2015 been strengthened by establishing an infrastructure to coordinate the FES' regional work out of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Regional Dialogue Southeast Europe (Dialogue SOE).

Dialogue SOE provides analysis of shared challenges in the region and develops suitable regional programs and activities in close cooperation with the twelve FES country offices across Southeast Europe. Furthermore, we integrate our regional work into joint initiatives with our colleagues in Berlin and Brussels. We aim to inform and be informed by the efforts of both local and international organizations in order to further our work in southeastern Europe as effectively as possible.

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- Social Democratic Politics and Values
- Social and Economic Justice
- Progressive Peace Policy

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