



Briefing

Political Trends & Dynamics in Southeast Europe

November 2016

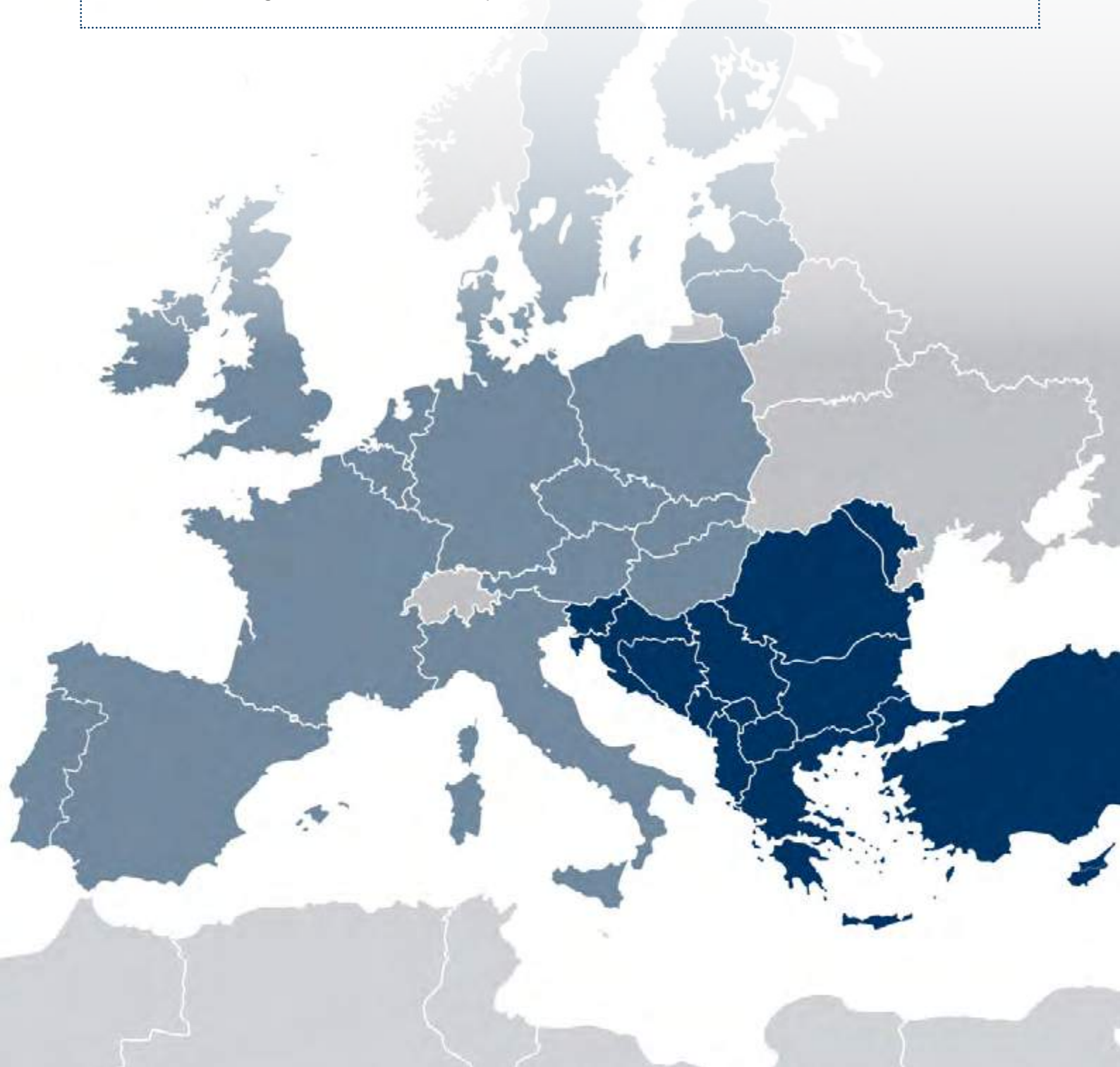
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Peace and stability initiatives represent a decades-long cornerstone of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's work in southeastern Europe. Recent events have only reaffirmed the centrality of Southeast European stability within the broader continental security 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. This is a joint project between the thirteen Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung offices in Southeast Europe and the Social Overview Service (SOS).



Elections and bilateral issues shaped Southeast Europe in November 2016. Election results in Bulgaria and Moldova raised concerns over a possible change in the geopolitical landscape. Potentially historic negotiations on the reunification of Cyprus suffered a setback without a breakthrough or concrete results. Bilateral misunderstandings were visible in the relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Despite substantial criticism in (potential) candidate country assessments, the accession process is moving forward in the region, except for Turkey, as the European Parliament called for a halt of negotiations with Ankara. Whether Albania will enter a new phase of relations with the EU depends on pending domestic reforms. Bosnia and Herzegovina is set to receive the questionnaire from the European Commission in December.

Regional Developments

Civil Society representatives and activists from Southeast Europe met in a regional Civil Society Forum in Skopje. They formulated positions on furthering Social Justice, European integration, and Democracy in the Western Balkans. A major gathering held for the fourth time within the Civil Society dimension of the 'Berlin Process', brought together new and established actors in addressing the growing distrust in democracy and its institutions in both the region and across the continent. Another regional initiative, the Joint History Project, which aims to bridge diverging historical narratives in Southeast Europe through the production of multi-perspective schoolbooks, entered its next phase, with the launch of two new editions in Brussels. The project was endorsed by leading officials from the EU and Southeast Europe present at the launch event in the European Parliament.

Albania

Judicial reform, the key condition for the opening of the country's EU membership negotiations, has dominated the political agenda, as political divisions have undermined prospects of an early start to the talks.

Key developments

- The Alliance Against the Import of Garbage (AAIG), a civil society group that opposes the

import of waste into the country, rallied in front of the parliament building on November 24. They protested against the law on integrated waste management. On November 14, the President returned the law on waste to the Assembly with the reasoning that it is in conflict with the constitution and international conventions and puts at risk the health of Albanian citizens. Protesters spent the night between November 23 and 24 outside, warning that they would not give up their cause. They also warned that the protest would escalate and that they would even confront MPs. The police was accused of violence by the activists of AAIG on Thursday morning, when two protesters were taken to a police commissariat. The opposition (Democratic Party) MPs walked out of the plenary session on Thursday and joined the protest. The leader of a new political party LILBRA, Ben Blushi, reiterated that Albania did not have the capacities to recycle waste imported from European countries in the first place.

- Prime Minister Rama gave an interview to the Greek TV channel SKAI on November 23 and spoke about bilateral issues that affect Albanian-Greek relations. The main issues were the so-called War Law, the Cham issue, the arrest of the two Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) drivers the week prior, and the maritime borders agreement. Rama said that the Greek general public should become aware of the fact that there is still a war law regarding Albania in effect in Greece. He described this situation as absurd. According to Rama, the War Law, still in force, was being used to prevent the Cham people from seeking their rights. Rama stated that Albania has no expansionist territorial plans against Greece or any other neighbouring country, nor any plans for obtaining the autonomy of Chameria. Edi Rama's interview caused a reaction among segments of the Greek media and political establishment. The biggest opposition party, *Nea Dimokratia* (*New Democracy*) demanded an urgent meeting of the National Security Council to draft a unified strategy of all political parties on relations with Albania, as they considered the mentioning of the Cham property issue a threat.
- Gunther Krichbaum, German Member of Parliament and Chair of the Bundestag's Committee on European Union Affairs, held a press conference in Tirana on November 24 to present seven expectations that Albania

should meet in order to receive the support of the CDU/CSU faction in the Bundestag to launch EU accession negotiations. These included implementing the public administration, electoral, lustration and justice reforms in compliance with European standards and the creation of special anticorruption and anti-organized-crime institutions.

- The European Commission recommended to the Council of the European Union on November 9 the opening of accession talks with Albania in December. The recommendation, which was published alongside the European Union's 2016 Albanian Progress Report, also outlined the conditions under which the country would be able to take forward its relationship with the European Union. Implementation of judicial reform and, in particular, the re-evaluation of some 800 judges and prosecutors under the Vetting Law, are key conditions for the beginning of negotiations and there is little prospect of them being met by December. On October 25, the Albanian Constitutional Court suspended the Vetting Law on the basis of an application from the opposition and it remains unclear when the Court will make a final ruling on this issue. On November 10, Prime Minister Edi Rama hailed the European Commission's decision and accused the opposition of undermining the country's path towards the European Union by blocking the Vetting Law.
- The international football match between Albania and Israel, which took place on November 12, occurred amid heightened security due to fears of an Islamic terrorist attack. As part of security preparations, the Albanian authorities arrested on November 8 four people accused of collaboration with ISIS in Syria and plotting an attack on the Israeli team. The authorities also changed the venue of the match. The match itself, which Albania lost 3-0, passed off without any major incidents. Five days after the match on November 17, Kosovo authorities arrested 19 more persons accused of plotting an attack on the Israeli team.

Next month's prospects

Albania is expected to fail in its efforts to meet EU conditions for the opening of negotiations by December, as judicial reforms remain blocked.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The arrest of ten former members of the Croat Defense Council (HVO) for alleged war crimes against Bosnian Serbs dominated Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH) political dynamics during November. The arrests caused a back-and-forth in political sniping between the leadership of both countries, as well as between different party representatives in BiH. Consequently, relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia deteriorated.

Key developments

- On October 31, Bosnia's State Protection and Investigation Agency (SIPA) arrested ten former HVO members, who are accused of committing war crimes in northern Bosnia, on the request of the State Prosecutor. The arrests came one day after the first official visit of Croatia's new Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic to BiH. During his two-day visit, Plenkovic visited Sarajevo as well as Mostar and other places. Plenkovic's visit was seen as a sign of his readiness to support BiH's EU path. The arrest of the former HVO soldiers, all of whom also have Croatian citizenship, has been interpreted as a blow to Plenkovic.
- Police agencies arrested former Interior Minister, Alija Delimustafic, on November 11 in a large operation conducted in cooperation with Croatian law-enforcement agencies. A spokesperson for the Prosecutor's Office said that raids had taken place in 60 locations across the two BiH entities, Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in Croatia. The operation involved Croatia's Office for Combating Corruption and Organised Crime, USKOK, as well as the Bosnian intelligence services. Delimustafic and other suspects are alleged members of organized crime groups, accused of i.a. abuse of office, money laundering and fraud.

Next month's prospects

BiH is expected to receive the European Commission questionnaire on December 9, and thereafter enter a "new phase" of relations with the EU from a legal standpoint. The process of replying to several thousand questions will take months, if not years.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria has been plunged into new political uncertainty in the wake of presidential elections and a referendum for the overhaul of the country's political system.

Key developments

- In the second round of the presidential elections on November 13, former air force commander, Rumen Radev was nominated by an initiative committee but supported by Bulgaria's leading opposition Socialist Party (BSP). He defeated the candidate of the ruling GERB party, speaker of the Bulgarian Parliament, Tsetska Tsacheva. Radev won nearly 60% of votes, having presented himself as a non-partisan candidate and calling for national unity. Even though Radev, who studied at Maxwell College in the US and speaks fluent English, stressed several times that membership in NATO and the EU for Bulgaria is without alternative, his political opponents and international media have portrayed him as a pro-Russian candidate, exaggerating some friendly rhetoric towards Moscow, which was not that different from his opponent Tsetska Tsacheva's claims. However, this position is in contrast to that of the current President, Rosen Plevneliev of the GERB, who has been an outspoken critic of the Kremlin. Most importantly, Radev achieved a landslide victory – he won without exception in all of Bulgaria's regions, showing a growing discontent with the Bulgarian political elite, a fact the leading political parties in the country will have to deal with in the years to come.
- The growing popularity of populism is also reflected by the remarkable result of ultra-right-wing candidate Krasimir Karakachanov (15% of votes in the first round) and the fact that several candidates adopted a clear anti-migrant stance.
- In the wake of Radev's overwhelming victory, Bulgarian Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov, who viewed the presidential contest as a vote of confidence in his cabinet, resigned, thus causing a political crisis in the country. Since the two main political parties in Bulgaria, the GERB and the BSP, are unwilling to form a technocratic government under the mandate

of the current parliament, Bulgaria's current President, Rosen Plevneliev, is obliged to form a third interim government in the course of his five-year term in office. But since he will be leaving his office in January, the constitution does not allow him to dissolve parliament and announce snap elections. Formally, even his formation of a caretaker government might be challenged, since the president elect has the formal right to form a new caretaker government when he takes office on January 22. Joint consultations between Plevneliev and Radev have already been held but are unlikely to produce major breakthroughs.

- A three-question referendum aimed at reforming the Bulgarian political system was held at the same time as the first round of presidential elections on November 6. Voters were asked whether they supported limiting public funding of political parties to one lev per year per valid vote received at the previous elections; the introduction of compulsory voting in elections and referendums (which has already been in effect since May); and changing the electoral system for the National Assembly to a two-round system. In order for the referendum to be binding, the number of turnout needed to be equal to or higher than the turnout in the 2014 parliamentary elections. While all three proposals were supported by a majority of those voting, the turnout was slightly lower than in the 2014 parliamentary elections. However, since more than 20 per cent of registered voters voted in favor, the proposals will still be debated in the parliament. Moreover, the BSP, the GERB and other parliamentary groups have pledged to enact the proposed changes in the following two months. Despite public support for electoral reform, analysts have warned that the changes might reinforce the positions of the big "establishment" parties at the expense of smaller parties and that this could disappoint most Bulgarian citizens, who had voted overwhelmingly for change.

Next month's prospects

The upcoming month will be crucial for the formation of a stable technocratic government tasked with organizing parliamentary elections in the spring. Amid growing political uncertainty, a divided parliament will have to vote on key legisla-

tive acts, including the state budget for 2017, anti-terror and anti-corruption bills, and changes to the political system outlined in the referendum.

Croatia

Relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina have deteriorated in the wake of the arrest of ten former Croat Defense Council (HVO) soldiers, all of whom were also Croatian citizens, in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Key developments

- The arrest on October 31 in Bosnia and Herzegovina of ten former members of the HVO, all of whom were also Croatian citizens, has generated a public outcry. Most public figures commented on the arrest, saying it showed that Croats in Bosnia were being pressured to leave the country.
- The arrest of the ten former HVO members has also been used by Croatian and Bosnian Croat hard-liners to undermine new Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic, who, according to them has become too popular and too moderate, too fast.
- President Grabar-Kitavoric was embroiled in a minor scandal when she was photographed posing with a WWII-era fascist flag during a diaspora meeting, which resulted in further tabloid sniping between Zagreb and Belgrade.
- The new Prime Minister visited Bosnia and Herzegovina in his first foreign visit, despite growing tensions between the two countries, signaling Zagreb's continued interest in "guiding" BiH towards EU and NATO membership.
- The opposition Social Democrats elected a new leader, Davor Bernardić. Bernardić is the party's former youth wing leader and supporters hope he will reinvigorate the party following another disappointing electoral loss earlier this year.

Next month's prospects

The key question will concern the emerging dynamic between the new SDP head and the HDZ-led government, as well as the stabilization of Zagreb-Sarajevo relations.

Cyprus

In November, a new round of negotiations for the settlement of the decades-long Cyprus conflict, seeking to address the most sensitive questions, moved away from the island to Switzerland and broke up on November 22.

Key developments

- On November 21, the latest round of negotiations between representatives of the two Cypriot communities in Mont Pelerin, Switzerland, came to a premature halt. In advance of the talks, both the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot sides had expressed optimism regarding their possible convergence on the remaining issues, namely the role of guarantor powers, criteria for territorial adjustments as well as the thorny issue of drafting such adjustments on a map of Cyprus. In the end, however, they could not agree on criteria for territorial adjustment and returned to Cyprus to reflect on the way forward. The Greek Cypriot side had wanted to determine the number of Greek Cypriot refugees who would be allowed to return to their properties in northern Cyprus, which they abandoned in 1974; various aspects related to the coastline of Cyprus; and, above all, the exact percentage share of Cyprus territory which would be controlled by each of the two communities.

Next month's prospects

The existing negotiations have gone further than previous talks and there will be tremendous domestic and international pressure to bring the long-standing conflict to a close, especially since the Brussels establishment desperately needs a "foreign policy win". Given the stakes, the talks are likely to proceed, albeit at a staid pace.

Greece

A month busy with domestic issues, including a cabinet reshuffle, ongoing negotiations with Greece's lenders and fallout from TV licensing reform, was topped by the visit of the outgoing US President Barack Obama.

Key developments

- Barack Obama visited Athens as the first destination of his final European tour as President of the United States. Domestically, expectations were high that Obama would give a boost to the government's hope of achieving a breakthrough on debt negotiations with European partners. In talks with Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, Obama emphasized that "austerity alone cannot deliver prosperity." Obama gave what has been called a "legacy speech," denouncing populism and upholding democratic values. After the speech, Obama flew to Berlin, where, so far at least, his calls for Greek debt relief have failed to have an impact.
- In mid-October, Prime Minister Tsipras met with European leaders and key institutional players to take forward discussions on Greece's debt. Two weeks later, the Alternate Finance Minister, Giorgos Houliarakis, clarified the government's position on debt relief, saying that the government accepts the benchmark set for debt sustainability that was laid out at the May 24 Eurogroup meeting. The latest round of talks on the second review of the third bailout agreement began on November 15, focused on the 2017 budget, medium-term fiscal strategy and labor-market reform, and took place under considerable time pressure in an atmosphere of continued anti-austerity protests and strikes. The government is eager to conclude the review so that talks on restructuring Greek debt can begin. Prime Minister Tsipras has expressed optimism that the second review "can and will" be concluded in advance of the December 5 Eurogroup meeting, so some agreement on the debt would be possible by the end of the year. This would be crucial for Greece to participate in the European Central Bank's quantitative-easing program and for increasing its chances of returning to the financial markets next year. Debt restructuring is especially crucial now as support for the coalition government continues to plunge. After President Obama's visit, Greek Finance Minister Tsakalotos again urged European leaders not to delay on Greek debt relief, as delay would jeopardize Greece's participation in the ECB's quantitative-easing program and threaten the country's economic recovery. The German government, however, has made it clear that any debt-relief measures would not be on the table until Greece had carried out all necessary reforms. Berlin does not wish to be perceived domestically as lenient towards Greece at a time when the extended German election campaign is getting under way.
- Prime Minister Tsipras mounted an unprecedented attack on Greece's top judges on October 27, after the Constitutional Court struck down his flagship bill to auction television broadcasting licenses. Tsipras's spokeswoman, Olga Gerovasili, said the ruling would deprive the state of the revenue it needed to fund kindergartens for 15,000 children and hire 4,000 nurses and blamed the judges for approving the country's debt restructuring in 2012 "which destroyed pension funds," and signing off on bailout agreements "which devastated Greece." This statement was part of a growing conflict between the government and the judiciary, which escalated earlier in October after the Justice Ministry ordered an investigation into Constitutional Court members and the judges' union responded by accusing the government of "blackmail."
- Political parties were ultimately able to reach a compromise solution on the establishment of an independent regulatory council to handle the TV licensing process, but only after the government made a number of concessions to the opposition. The National Council for Radio and Television (ESR) is now expected to organize the procedure and decide how many TV licenses should be made available. The Court's ruling and subsequent developments have undermined SYRIZA's policies, which the government had presented as an attempt to tackle corruption in the country's media and the opposition viewed as an attempt to close down "unfriendly" media and create a media environment favorable to the ruling parties.
- In an effort to revive momentum and bolster support, Prime Minister Tsipras reshuffled his cabinet on November 4, bringing in several new faces and moving some existing ministers to different positions. It was the first cabinet reshuffle of this administration. The conservative opposition New Democracy Party called the reshuffle a "recycling of

the same corrupt faces.” Yet analysts expect the new cabinet to be more open to carrying out necessary changes, such as facilitating new privatizations and changing labor laws, which are requirements for the second review of Greece’s third bailout program.

Next month’s prospects

As the SYRIZA-led coalition government’s popularity plunges, Prime Minister Tsipras is investing huge political capital in efforts to reach agreement with European creditors on debt relief. Taking into account the slightly positive momentum in the Greek economy the government hopes that Greece’s economic prospects will improve considerably if the country were to enter the ECB’s quantitative-easing program and return to the financial markets and that this will help its popularity to rebound.

Kosovo

November saw some progress in the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. At the same time, tensions grew between the government and the Vetevendosje movement.

Key developments

- A 26-year-old member of Kosovo’s opposition Vetevendosje party, Astrit Dehari, died in a prison in Prizren on November 6. He had been detained there since August, having been arrested on suspicion of terrorism for allegedly throwing an explosive device in the Kosovo parliament. Vetevendosje representatives demanded an independent autopsy and accused the authorities of being responsible for his death. On November 14, thousands of citizens joined protests on the streets of Pristina, demanding justice for the activist. According to a report from Kosovo’s Forensic Department, which was published on November 18, Dehari committed suicide. Prizren’s Chief Prosecutor, Syle Hoxha, said that the cause of death had been suffocation – respiratory failure due to the closure of the upper respiratory pathways by a strong tool. Vetevendosje has not accepted the results of the report from Kosovo’s Forensic Department and demands an independent investigation.

After the pressure from civil society the Minister of Justice, Dhurata Hoxha, suspended four prison officials, three guardians and the acting director of the prison in Prizren.

- Kosovo police announced on November 16 that, in collaboration with security and anti-terror organizations in neighboring countries, during November they arrested 19 people suspected of preparing terrorist activities across the region and seized explosives, ammunition, a drone and communication devices. The group, which comprised 18 Kosovo citizens and one Macedonian citizen, was, according to the police statement taking orders from the Kosovo Albanian ISIS leader, Lavdrim Muhaxheri, who is currently fighting in Syria. The police said it had been following the group for some months and that the arrests – coordinated with Albanian and Macedonian Police forces – started on November 4. The police also said that the arrests had prevented terrorist attacks in both Kosovo and in the region, including one planned against the Israeli football team during its match with Albania on November 12.
- After six years of negotiation, representatives of Belgrade and Pristina reached agreement in Brussels on November 13 on a telephone code for Kosovo. The country’s new code, which is scheduled to be activated on December 15, will be 383 and the process of transferring to it is expected to last two years. Both parties agreed on mobile telephone and frequency bands and spectrums to be allocated to the Serbian state-owned company MTS in Kosovo, allowing it to continue to provide the existing level of coverage to its customers. Opposition parties in Kosovo were critical of the agreement claiming it legalized Serbia’s presence in Kosovo. Kosovo government representatives presented the agreement as critical for Kosovo’s telecommunications independence.

Next month’s prospects

Tensions between Vetevendosje and the government are likely to continue following months of increasingly partisan and militant disputes. It remains to be seen whether Hasim Thaci’s government considers Vetevendosje a legitimate electoral challenger, however. Tense relations with

Serbia will continue, especially following FM Ivica Dacic's angry departure from a multi-lateral summit in Poland.

Macedonia

The political agenda has been dominated by the election campaign ahead of the December 11 polls.

Key developments

- The metal-producing factory Jugohrom near the village of Jegunovce in northwestern Macedonia closed temporarily on November 3 as result of its failure to meet an end-October deadline to install air filters. The factory, which produces ferrosilicon alloy, is believed to be responsible for the high level of pollution in the Polog valley, including in the town of Tetovo. Representatives of the factory, which employs some 750 people and accounts for 1 per cent of the country's GDP, asked for more time to install air filters, which are expected to reduce the pollution, but their request was denied. On November 12, Jugohrom workers blocked the highway that connects Tetovo with Skopje in protest. The protest's initiative itself is questionable and many believe that the owners of the factory are the ones spearheading the motion to protest in order to put pressure on re-opening Jugohrom without finishing the entire modification of the filter-system while putting the economic wellbeing of its workers in the first place. The factory will be closed until the end of January 2017, during which time Jugohrom is expected to be able to install the required air filters. However, citizens and civil-society organizations fear that the motivation for this initiative – spearheaded by the Macedonia's Environment Minister Bashkim Ameti and the chairman of the Tetovo municipality, Teuta Arifi – was political in the run-up to the December elections.
- The Special Prosecution announced on November 18 that it had launched a new investigation – codenamed "Target" – into Macedonia's wiretapping scandal. The Special Prosecution allege that 10 people from the secret state agency illegally wiretapped at least 5,827 telephone numbers between

2008 and 2015. The prosecutors refused to name the 10 suspects but media speculated that the group included Saso Mijalkov, a cousin of Nikola Gruevski, former Prime Minister and head of the ruling VMRO DPMNE party. The Special Prosecution released the names of some of those who had been targeted by the illegal wiretapping, including ministers of Gruevski government, political opponents and journalists. On the same day, the VMRO, which ruled the country during the period of wiretapping, accused the Special Prosecution of helping the opposition in its election campaign and denied responsibility for the wiretapping, saying that Gruevski himself had been under surveillance.

- In the campaign for the long-awaited and twice postponed 2016 snap-Parliamentary Elections the ruling parties (VMRO DPMNE and DUI) had already, albeit unofficially, started their visible ground campaign work several months prior to the legally constituted campaign start (20 days before the actual election day). This was also evident in this year's first two failed election attempts when VMRO DPMNE wanted to enter the election process unopposed, and started campaigning ahead of time as well. The ruling parties' campaigns are noticeably "priced", as the need to bus-around participants/party members from all over the country in order to show massive turnout is still evident.
- VMRO DPMNE's campaign rhetoric is focused on Foreign Direct Investments and on a "fear of federalization", which they suggest the opposition is promoting. VMRO DPMNE, who are campaigning for a 'front for defending Macedonia as a whole', have been joined by Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sebastian Kurz, in a rally in downtown Skopje, where he endorsed the ruling party and thanked the Macedonian people for their support in closing the Balkans route. Kurz' gesture prompted vigorous reactions on social media.

Next month's prospects

The focus in December will be on the general elections, scheduled for December 11. The elections are deemed crucial for halting Macedonia's prolonged crisis, which started in February

2015, when the opposition Social Democratic Party (SDSM) leader, Zoran Zaev, accused former Prime Minister Gruevski of ordering large-scale illegal wiretapping.

Moldova

The election of a pro-Russian President has raised concerns among Chisinau's Western allies. Meanwhile, the country secured long-anticipated funding from the International Monetary Fund, thereby providing an economic lifeline.

Key developments

- In Moldova's first direct presidential election since 1996 pro-Russian candidate, Igor Dodon of the Party of Moldova's Socialists (PSRM), defeated his pro-European rival, Maia Sandu of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS). Dodon narrowly missed winning the presidency in the first round of voting on October 31, with almost 49 per cent of votes. Sandu finished second, ahead of eight other candidates, with 38.42 per cent. In the second round on November 14, Dodon won 52.2 per cent and Sandu 47.8 per cent accordingly. The result of the election, which is considered a test for Moldova's geopolitical orientation, has raised concerns among Chisinau's Western allies, as well as Romania. On another note, Prime Minister Pavel Filip stated that Moldova is a parliamentary country and that it would remain on a European road.
- Dodon's election also increased tensions at home, where around 1000 people took to the streets of Chisinau to protest against the results, alleging that the process had been rigged. Moldovan human-rights groups, including the Human Rights Information Center, asked the authorities to investigate the legality of the election. The defeated candidate, Maia Sandu announced that she will be going to the Constitutional Court to present arguments of election fraud. However, international observers from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe reported that the elections transpired in accordance to international standards.
- Despite political uncertainties, Moldova received an economic lifeline from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on November 7, as Prime Minister Pavel Filip's government managed to obtain a three-year funding program of \$178.7 million in total. The first installment of around \$46 million was transferred to Chisinau as soon as the agreement was signed, unlocking public spending in Moldova. In the wake of this agreement, the European Union and the World Bank are also expected to release funding to Chisinau.

Next month's prospects

IMF funding should allow Filip's government to cover not only wages, pensions and other stalled social payments, but also to launch infrastructure and development projects, etc. Chisinau's partners, however, would expect the government to speed up structural reforms, especially in the financial sector. Meanwhile, Dodon's election may cast a shadow over the country's relations with the European Union.

Montenegro

Over the past month, Montenegro was focused on implementing the results of its October elections.

Key developments

- The constitutive session of Montenegro's new parliament took place on November 7. The Parliament's top officials were not elected on that occasion, however. At a parliamentary session on November 24, Ivan Bajrović, leader of the Social Democrats (SD) became the new Speaker of Parliament. From the three deputy speakers, two were elected, while one post, designated to the opposition, remained empty, as the opposition continued boycotting Parliament. The opposition argues that the October elections had not been democratic or free. Citing irregularities, they also requested information on the arrests of a group of Serbian citizens accused of planning terrorist attacks on Election Day.
- The ruling DPS proposed its Vice-President, Dusko Markovic, for the position of Prime

Minister. Markovic is one of Djukanovic's closest aides, whom he has worked closely with since 1997. During this period he served as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for the State Security Service. Markovic occupied several other posts, including Deputy Prime Minister in charge of the Political System, Justice Minister and briefly Minister for Human and Minority Rights. From 2005 to 2010, he was Director of the National Security Agency. His government was inaugurated on November 28 by presenting his program and members of the Cabinet to the parliament. His government will have four Vice-Presidents and nineteen ministers.

- The attempted "coup", which was allegedly aimed at toppling Djukanovic on Election Day, remains a topic of controversy. Djukanovic has gone on record saying that Russia needed to explain the involvement of Russian nationalists in this enterprise, alleging that leaders of the Democratic Front had been plotting his assassination.

Next month's prospects

Montenegro's new government took office and started working. Divisions among political blocks are expected to persist in the next period.

Romania

Having been managed by a technocratic government for almost a year, Romania is bracing itself for parliamentary elections on December 11 amid growing international concerns.

Key developments

- With December's election approaching, speculation as to who will be Romania's new Prime Minister is growing. While the center-left Social Democrats (PSD) are leading the polls and hope to form a government together with the liberals from ALDE, the center-right Liberal Party (PNL) has announced its intention to nominate current technocratic Prime Minister Dacian Ciolos as its candidate to head a future government. The Save Romania Union (USR), a newly created political party, re-vindicating itself from the

recent street movements, has also declared its support for Ciolos, making him one of the key figures in the upcoming election, even though he is not officially running for office.

- Moldova's election of a pro-Russian president has raised concerns in Romania, which has continuously tried to assist its neighbor on its path to EU integration, including the provision of aid funding for education and infrastructure. Dodon's election might undermine relations between Romania and Moldova, although Romanian President Klaus Iohannis has declared his commitment to maintaining a friendly partnership with Moldova.

Next month's prospects

Romania's December 11 parliamentary elections will be the main event in the next month. While no party is expected to win an absolute majority, key political actors will face pressure to form a new government as fast as possible so a budget framework can be adopted for 2017.

Serbia

The discovery of weapons and ammunition caches in several locations in Serbia has generated much discussion during the past month. It is being portrayed as evidence to the effect that Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic may be the target of an alleged assassination attempt.

Key developments

- Days after Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic announced a new phase in the fight against crime, on October 29, police discovered a cache of weapons and ammunition near Vucic's family house outside Belgrade. A similar cache was found on November 1 in a garage in New Belgrade. On November 16, police in Apatin found a huge load of explosives, including nine kilograms of plastic explosives, 20.7 kilograms of TNT, dozens of electric detonators, 111 hand grenades, 12 hand-held anti-tank bombs, numerous guns as well as 6,000 rounds of ammunition, one anti-tank mine and other accompanying accessories. All of these events have caused great concerns amongst the public who fear

for the security of the country. According to media speculation, the weapons were left by organized-crime groups from throughout the region, as a warning to Vucic and his planned efforts aimed at curbing organized crime.

- In November, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) completed its latest review of Serbia's Stand-By Arrangement, including the agreement on key parameters of Serbia's 2017 budget. The IMF recommended an acceleration of structural reforms, but also approved the Government's plans to increase salaries and pensions. This came as a surprise, since the IMF had previously appeared to indicate that any additional resources should be used to repay debt, rather than on new spending commitments. As a result, the government announced plans to increase salaries for teachers and education workers between 6 and 7% and promised medical workers, police and the military pay rises of 5%. Despite these measures, labor unrest has grown. The Trade Union of Education Workers of Serbia organized a warning strike of teachers unhappy with their status on November 19, seeking wage rises of between 10 and 14.2%. In addition, members of Serbia's military trade union protested on November 27, which were the first protests by enlisted soldiers. Although trade unions were disappointed with the size of the announced salary increases, Serbia's Fiscal Council considered them excessive. Its members argued that Serbia was not in a position to increase public spending and warned that the country's structural reforms had almost come to a halt in 2016.
- Serbia and Russia held joint military exercises in Serbia between November 3 and 9. In the exercise, entitled "Slavic Brotherhood", more than 700 troops from Serbia, Russia and Belarus staged helicopter assaults, a mock attack on an insurgent base and the evacuation of casualties. They also practiced an artillery bombardment. The launch of the exercise coincided with the end of a NATO event in Montenegro, which focused on handling emergency situations such as floods and chemical attacks that included 680 unarmed personnel from seven NATO members and ten partner countries, including Serbia.
- On November 15, Serbia's ruling Progressive Party (SNS) was accepted as an associate member of the European People's Party (EPP), the largest party organization in the European Parliament. Associate membership is customary for political parties from countries that are candidates for EU membership. The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), which is already a member of the EPP, abstained during the vote. HDZ leader and Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković later reiterated that both the SNS and the Serbian government needed to fulfill their commitments and carry out structural reforms if they wanted to progress on the EU path.
- Prime Minister Victor Orban traveled to Serbia on November 20, where he was welcomed by Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic. The visit took place in Niš, in southern Serbia, and was comprised of a series of bilateral meetings, a joint session of the two governments and participation in a business forum organized by the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and the Hungarian National Trading House.
- Similarly to previous months, a significant number of asylum-seekers and migrants was reported during November in Serbia by UNHCR and other organizations. Most of the 6,300 registered refugees stayed in the twelve governmental facilities, five asylum centers and in 'transit' or reception centers. However, some of them were counted at the border with Hungary or in the Belgrade city center. Fifty to Sixty refugees and migrants went out on a protest march from Belgrade to the Croatian border on November 10, but the authorities denied them crossing.

Next month's prospects

Discussions on the selection of candidates for Serbia's 2017 presidential elections are expected to dominate the political agenda in the coming month, as well as the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Turkey

A deteriorating economy, the continuous government clampdown and bad relations with the European Union contribute to worsening the situation in Turkey.

Key developments

- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's clampdown against alleged coup plotters continues to include opposition groups. In a series of raids between November 4 and 6, Turkish authorities detained 14 MPs from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). Nine of them, including two co-chairs, Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksekdag, were later formally arrested. The authorities said the arrests were a part of a probe against 14 HDP deputies over alleged links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The government revoked parliamentary immunity for those MPs on May 20, after which courts have summoned them for questioning on several occasions. The MPs were arrested after they repeatedly refused to appear for questioning, arguing that their immunity had been revoked for political reasons. The arrest of HDP MPs triggered further concerns, since it appears also to have been in violation of Turkey's constitution, which stipulates that MPs cannot be jailed, even if their immunity has been revoked, unless sentenced by a court.
- Turkish police entered the offices of Cumhuriyet daily newspaper, the most prominent and one of oldest of the remaining opposition medium, on October 21, detaining many of its staff. Following questioning, the police formally arrested ten senior staff on November 5, including editor-in-chief Murat Sabuncu and columnist Kadri Gursel. They were accused of supporting Kurdish militants as well as the Gulen Movement. With these latest arrests, the number of journalists arrested in the clampdown rose to 143. Following the arrests, the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), warned that President Erdogan and his government were the greatest threats to the country's future and pledged to organize public protests by the end of the month. Erdogan responded by accusing the CHP of treason and launching a criminal case against its leadership.
- The ongoing political crisis is increasingly affecting Turkey's economy. While government officials continue to insist that the economy remains strong, recent statistical data indicates a slowdown. According to data issued by the Turkish Statistical Agency (TUIK) in November, unemployment jumped from 10.1 to

11.3 per cent between July and August. Moreover, the figures are likely to be higher, as this data does not include tens of thousands of people suspended or removed in the clampdown. One of the main labor unions, KESK, estimated the real unemployment rate to be closer to 20 per cent. In addition, the value of the Turkish Lira has continued to fall against the US dollar and most other currencies despite stabilizing efforts by the Central Bank.

- The ongoing clampdown continues to undermine Turkey's relations with the European Union. EU concerns over developments in Turkey were reflected in an especially critical annual Progress Report, which was released on November 9. In addition, European Parliament President, Martin Schulz, said on November 13 that the European Union could impose economic sanctions, if Turkey were to continue its witch-hunt against the opposition. Accession talks might be shelved, if Turkey were to reinstate the death penalty. These statements represent the strongest warning to Erdogan to date in relation to the post-coup clampdown. Erdogan responded the next day in a television interview in which he said that Turkey might decide by the end of the year to put its EU talks to a referendum, which would take place next year. On November 20, Erdogan ratcheted up his rhetoric, announcing that the European Union was not the only option for Turkey and that the Russian-led Shanghai Pact could be an alternative. This month's dynamics culminated with a Resolution by the European Parliament on November 24 which called to halt the accession talks with Turkey.

Next month's prospects

The situation is expected to continue to deteriorate as a result of the government's continuing clampdown, the economic slowdown and a growing number of terrorist attacks, as well as the country's military involvements in Iraq and Syria. Opposition protests, scheduled for the end of November, as well as the ongoing debate about the transformation of Turkey's parliamentary system into a presidential system are expected to contribute to further divisions and tensions. EU governments' reactions to the EP resolution will be crucial to follow in December as well.

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.

Our regional initiatives are advanced through three broad working lines:

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

Our website provides information about individual projects within each of these working lines, past events, and future initiatives: <http://www.fes-southeasteurope.org>

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