



Briefing

Political Trends & Dynamics

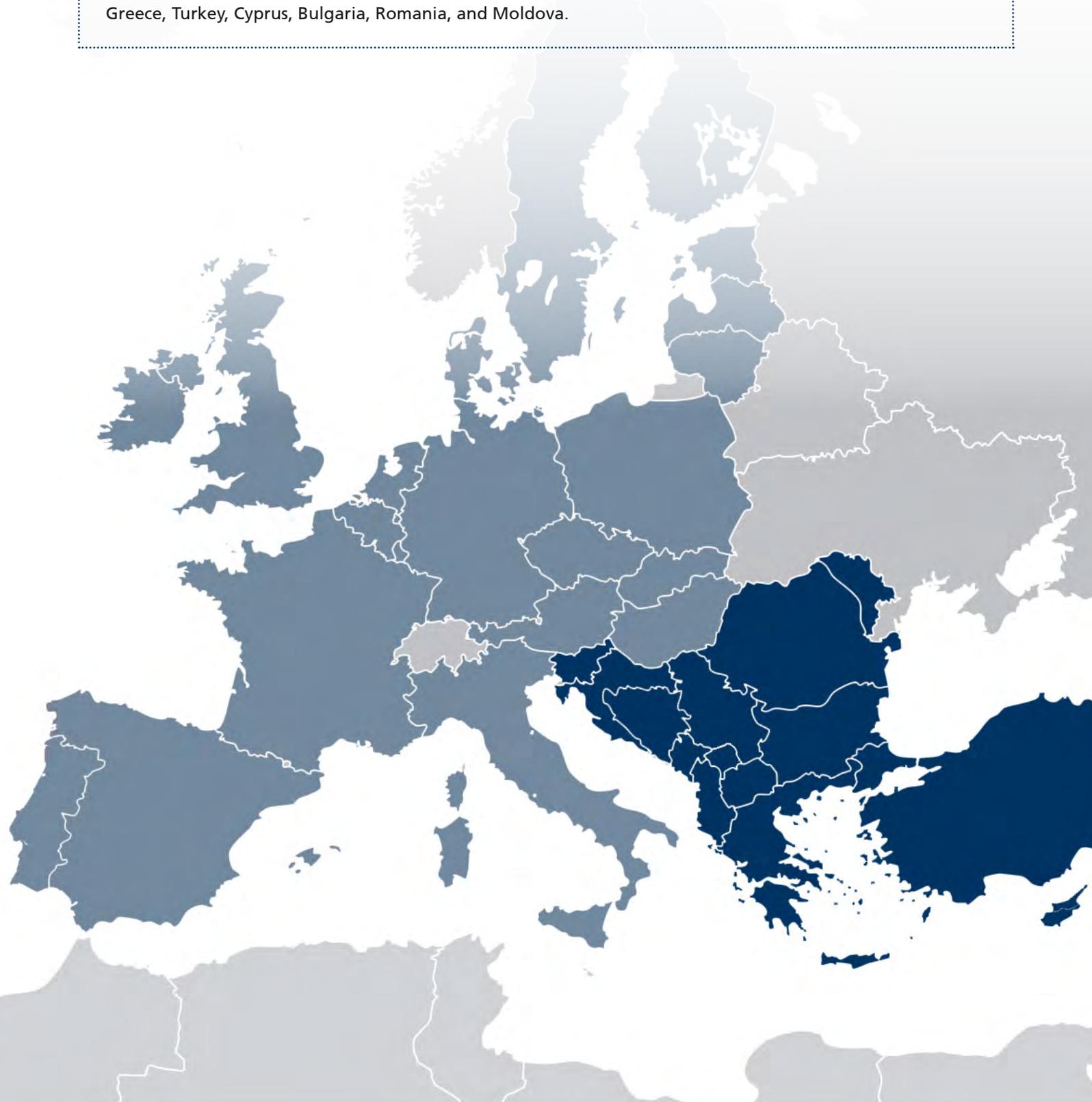
Emerging Leadership in Southeast Europe

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Political Trends & Dynamics in Southeast Europe

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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.



Editorial

Jasmin Mujanović & Alida Vračić

The recent change in government in Macedonia, a small (symbolic, yet important) step forward in Bosnian-Serbian relations embodied by to the first Serbian presidential visit to Bosnia after six years, and Montenegro's final integration into NATO, have all provided a much needed dose of good news in Southeast Europe. On the other hand, diplomatic deterioration continues elsewhere; between Bosnia and Croatia concerning the construction of the Pelješac Bridge, but also a host of other real and imagined grievances, in Turkey's continued drift towards autocracy, and in Cyprus, with the collapse with of a deal to reunite the island collapsing at the eleventh hour. Too often it appears that, across the region, genuine political progress is held back by intransigent partisan deadlock and old ideological grudges. Why is this the case and, indeed, what drives the perpetuation of these Gordian disputes?

Traditional accounts have focused on the dominance of ethnic politics in the region to explain this dynamic. In short, a fundamentally zero-sum culture of politics, rooted in sectarian grievances, prevents the emergence of active engagement and leadership. Others suggest that it is the compounding legacies of authoritarianism which have stymied patterns of accountability from developing. Still others point to the imperfect and incomplete democratic transitions across the region, which had resulted in regimes dominated by corrupt political parties and weakened true reformist efforts, while genuine architects of change remained marginalized. Whatever the cause, the outcome is the same: new ideas, progressive leadership, and genuine vistas for the region's future are chronically lacking.

What then constitutes actual leadership and a real progressive vision for Southeast Europe's future? At its heart, it is a matter of dispensing with the intractable and the pointless, much of which only seems insurmountable because of a lack of political will or incentive to address it. This is not to diminish the careful work of diplomacy and arbitration, but to re-center the analytical case for policy debate in the region, from micro to macro, and from a focus on management to an insistence on resolution. To resolve, for instance, the so-called "name dispute" between Athens and Skopje should not be a Herculean task. An agreement between the two countries, in which Skopje is allowed to use its constitutional name internationally in exchange for an explicit disavowal of any real or imagined claims on Greek Macedonia, should not be difficult. Indeed, much of the architecture for such an agreement already exists. Nor should the implementation of the already established Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue be an issue, or the rationalization of public administration on Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU candidacy path. The examples are legion. Given how obvious these challenges are, what is required for movement largely boils down to a shift in political culture; the emergence of new leaders across the region, able to establish new, solutions-oriented dialogue.

At the European level, however, is where the real breakthroughs can be made. If there is a sense that there is a possibility to mobilize citizens around tangible concerns, the EU should encourage their participation. A great deal depends on Brussels' ability to speak forcefully and clearly: we will no longer waste our resources or energies on attempting to resolve banal disputes between bad faith actors. Indeed, the EU's decades-long coddling of intransigent elites has depleted the bloc's capacities and interests in resolving the region's actual crises: chronic unemployment, corruption, and emigration to name but a few issues. The re-introduction of ordinary citizens into these processes is therefore crucial.

Of course, this does not negate that the primary terrain for policy-making is local. Nevertheless, whether Brussels is able to acknowledge as much openly or not, it is inexorably tied to Southeast Europe. The Union's own political stability and security depend on turning the corner on the generational process of democratization in the region. Rather than wait for the local crop to ripen, the EU must itself fertilize the terrain for change.

So, in light of the recent transfer of power in Macedonia but also the aforementioned broader regional trends, what is the future of leadership about in Southeast Europe? Is it realistic to believe that en-

trenched political elites can leave aside old ideological narratives and turn to genuine solutions and compromise? More importantly, should citizens trust that such results can be delivered in their lifetime by these politicians? Or is this entire conversation, first and foremost, predicated on demanding and engineering the emergence of new political actors?

The contributions this month - especially the interviews with Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and Minister of Defense Radmila Shekerinska Jankovska – examine the prospects for new forms and sources of leadership across Southeast Europe. As a result, Macedonia looms large in this issue but as the lessons of the revolution in Skopje are not yet entirely clear – and past experiences suggest that breakthroughs can quickly stall – it remains a point of debate. Finally, while the whole ideal of leadership may appear somewhat nebulous, it is, at heart, a simple matter driving our discussions: how can change be made in Southeast Europe and who can make it?

Interviews

We spoke to Zoran Zaev, Prime Minister of Macedonia since May 31, 2017, and Radmila Shekerinska Jankovska, the country's Minister of Defense, about their principles of leadership and about their approach to bringing about change in Macedonia and in the region.

FES: *There have been new energetic leaders in this region before, who despite high expectations turned out to be similar to the nationalist elites who preceded them. What makes your government different and why people should trust you will deliver democratic and solution-focused decision-making?*

Zaev: I, personally – first and foremost as a man, but also as Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia – can say that we've learnt the lessons from the past and it is something we don't intend to repeat. We lost plenty of time trying to redress bad decisions made in the past. We decided to write a new future – a future of commonality, partnership, good neighborliness, and brotherhood, if you will. Time is the only resource we cannot produce, dig out, or recreate. It is the perception that leads to genuine evolution and appropriate use of all opportunities knocking at our door.

Only by resorting to courageous decisions can we try to recover the damage caused in years past. Courageous decisions will be a sign of our newly developed maturity and readiness to take responsibility for our own actions. Courageous decisions are the only decisions worth remembering. They will bring progress and build a better future for Macedonian citizens and the region as a whole.

FES: *What is your leadership philosophy?*

Zaev: We've seen and heard a lot of politicians use strong words in the past. It's about time we value our time and act responsibly with it. It's time for leaders whose actions speak louder than their words, who are not afraid to create the future, instead of relying on the glory and myths of the past. At the end of the day, once we assume office, we stop being individuals speaking in a personal capacity. We represent our citizens, their voice, and their hope for a better future. So, courageous solutions, brought in a process of serious analysis and rationalization, are the only possible solutions.

Zoran Zaev, Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia



FES: *The "name issue" with Greece has gone on for years. In the first few months in office, your government has shown an enviable level of pragmatism on this matter. Is this the leadership style you want to demonstrate?*

Zaev: This is a very complex issue as both sides have made certain mistakes at different times in the past. More importantly, however, we are currently working on improving confidence-building measures to give fresh impetus to overcoming the long-standing bilateral dispute. The name dispute is our biggest challenge at hand. Personally, I think it will be a test to our maturity and evolution in the years of isolation, but also an answer to the question whether we've learned to value the qualities that bring prosperity and better future. After closing all open issues by signing the bilateral agreement on friendship, good-neighborliness, and cooperation with Bulgaria, the Government will now focus on finding a solution to the dispute with Greece. The process will move forward in a concrete way. Most importantly, I am encouraged by the fact that we started communicating again. A number of meetings between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs have already taken place.

In the meantime, the Government is dedicated to a new foreign policy vis-à-vis our neighbors.

We act without prejudice and are open to dialogue, continuously presenting our new political approach to building new friendly relations with NATO and EU member states. The opposite approach in the past decade left us isolated and deprived of the opportunities and perspectives available when amongst friends, a future we could have enjoyed if the EU and NATO had indeed been a priority. The Republic of Macedonia has no other perspective but the European one. Our future is in the NATO alliance and the European Union as equal partners in peace keeping and active participants in building a better world for all. I will be an optimist and reiterate that the European perspective of our country is more concrete and palpable than ever before. Macedonia is next in line for accession to NATO. Concurrently, we will start accession negotiations with the EU.

FES: Although all of the countries of the region have their own specificities, are there other examples in the region where you see similarities with Macedonia in terms of upcoming challenges and changes?

All countries of the region share more or less similar concerns and commitments for their resolution. We even share our ambitions. There are no differences on these issues. In my opinion, the Trieste Summit, held under the auspices of the Berlin Process, was a summit of unification, an occasion to extend a hand to overcome our misunderstandings and start over with a clean slate in Western Balkan contemporary history. A picture of mature leadership and proof that we are fed up with divisions; a historic moment of accepting the reality that the world will no longer tolerate our hesitation and questionable dedication to taking our citizens to a better common future. We've been writing new history for our countries since the Summit. We lagged be-

hind for far too long and lost too much time. It's time to join our forces and jointly redeem as much as we can so our citizens taste the fruits of freedom and change they have longed for for over a decade.

In the last 6–7 months, we also witnessed that intensive meetings, knowledge-sharing, and most importantly, unhindered openness to cooperation produce results both domestically and at a regional level. We all saw the benefits of successful initiatives and actions brought by regional political leaders sitting around the table. Each initiative takes us a step closer to membership in the family of European countries. We reached concrete joint agreements with concrete financial arrangements that should boost regional development and activities with a direct effect on stabilizing and strengthening our economies, including in specific areas inciting free movement of citizens of our countries, such as tourism and cultural exchange. These are the messages we would like to send out from our meetings so far – that stronger regional cooperation is a key factor for the economic integration of Western Balkan countries with EU or NATO.

Concurrently, we use these regional and multi-lateral meetings to resolve all outstanding bilateral issues, all the while trying to demonstrate our good intentions for deeper and fruitful cooperation. Rest assured we intend to stay on this course of strengthening and improving neighborly relations. All countries of the Western Balkans are dedicated to building a system based on the rule of law and good governance, professional and unbiased judiciary, public administration reforms, fight against crime and corruption, and free media and civil society. I strongly believe that these challenges can become our strength, as a problem shared is a problem halved.

FES: *There have been new energetic leaders in this region before, who despite high expectations turned out to be similar to the nationalist elites who preceded them. What makes your government different and why people should trust you will deliver democratic and solution-focused decision-making?*

Shekerinska: Unfortunately, that has been a recurring theme when it comes to governments in the region. But it is 2017, and we are no longer young states. Macedonia celebrated 26 years of independence this year and as a new government we will aim to demonstrate the maturity and values of a modern European state. We spent the last two years protesting, not so that one authoritarian and corrupt government could be replaced with another of the same kind. I did it – we did it – to move our country forward and end those practices, once and for all.

In the second expert report by [leader of the EU's expert team on reform priorities] Reinhard Priebe and the team, it was stated that it is vital for "state capture" not to merely change hands but for it to end. We are in complete agreement with the assessment and this is a message that has been received loud and clear. In that context, besides a heavy emphasis on Euro-Atlantic integration processes, this government's flagship policy has been increasing transparency. This is something that has been at the very core of the government's operation so far on all levels. Firstly, we laid out all the necessary reforms in a concrete plan named "3-6-9," which will allow the public to hold us accountable for our promises and what we deliver. I think it is essential for the public and civil society to closely monitor and challenge our policies and the direction the government is taking. We are also committed to regaining people's confidence in state institutions which is why we have declassified a number of files and processes in the spirit of transparency and accountability. When the eye of the public, civil society, and the judiciary is on the decision-makers and their policy, the margin of error or of undemocratic governance significantly drops. Even when it comes to the media, we are cultivating a relationship where we are in the service of the media, not the other way around. In fact, some media outlets which were previously characterized as "pro-opposition" are now some of our starkest critics, and that is how it should be. Transparency is the key, and I think all of this testifies that this pro-

Radmila Shekerinska Jankovska,
Minister of Defense of the Republic of Macedonia



cess will certainly not succumb to improvisation, rather, that it is very carefully constructed and thought through.

FES: *What is your leadership philosophy?*

Shekerinska: The crucial philosophy of our movement at large is that this will be a government for all, not the few. We showcased this when we reached out to an electorate which has never before voted outside of their ethnic block, and they responded to our offer. It was an honest, fair, and progressive approach and the people recognize that. Beyond ethnic divisions, we reached out to those who were disenfranchised by a system which catered to party interests and blurred all lines between party and state. We made it clear that party membership is a matter of ideology not the center of everyday life. The currency for success will be a good idea and hard work, not allegiance to the new government.

We want to end identity politics and bring discourse concerning actual progress to the fore. Our citizens are concerned with results, economic growth, infrastructural projects, good international relations – a European future. We want to focus on delivering this to build a better tomorrow without it being populist. We are less focused on the ritz-and-glitz of cabinet politics and more on the very dense reform agenda ahead.

FES: *Is the time of strongmen in the region over?*

Shekerinska: It is difficult to say whether it is over, but here in Macedonia we have certainly provided an alternative. We are attempting to

harness the intellectual capital of our nation, deliver results, and lead by example. I am convinced that once the enormous difference which is already being felt comes to light, the citizens themselves will end the era of strongmen. Having said that, old habits die hard and we have a culture which is very prone to this social phenomenon. We are deeply aware of that and we are trying to address it by leading by example and demonstrating very clearly that strongmen do not bring prosperity.

FES: Given the number of ongoing issues in the region, unresolved borders, diplomatic tensions, and economic hardship, how will you appeal to your own people and across the region?

Shekerinska: For a very long time we have unfortunately followed the agenda rather than dictating it. Right now the region needs leadership which will have clear priorities and set the tone of the public discourse. It is vital to not stray into the traps of nationalist rhetoric. I recognize we are facing very complex diplomatic challenges as a region, but those are not the only challenges we are facing. We are also struggling with unemployment, brain drain, low economic growth, corruption, environmental issues, and other problems that directly affect everyday life. This was the very inspiration for our slogan "Life for everyone." This is what gives the alternative to nationalism, the gravitas it needs. Nationalism feeds on the past and on conflict at the cost of the present and the future. If we return the focus on the "now" and the issues which are causing the exodus of our citizens, unemployment, and all the problems we are facing as a country, people will listen – regardless of creed, ethnic background, or political affiliation. We have a relevant message, and we have to consistently communicate it and demonstrate that when we are in power that message morphs into policy, and that policy yields results.

FES: The "name issue" with Greece has gone on for years. In the first few months in office, your government has shown an enviable level of pragmatism on this matter. Is this the leadership style you want to demonstrate?

Shekerinska: This is a very delicate matter and it will require a constructive approach from both sides. Considering the massive setbacks in this process over the last decade, we as a government have showcased a spirit of cooperation and a will for dialogue. A sound resolution will take extensive negotiation, a lot of listening, and flexibility on both sides. It is not an easy process, but that is what leadership is. Tackling difficult issues in difficult times and emerging with a solution that is future-oriented rather than entrenched in the past.

FES: Although all of the countries of the region have their own specificities, are there other examples in the region where you see similarities with Macedonia in terms of upcoming challenges and changes? What are the most immediate things that the region as a whole needs?

Shekerinska: Besides strengthening democratic principles, rule of law, media freedom, I think the first step is good neighborly relations. We need to find ways to work with one another. After all, we do struggle with a lot of similar challenges and working together to respond to common challenges will always be good for us and our people. If our regional relations revolve around trade, effective communication, cooperation, and common growth, I think our future prospects will definitely be brighter. For a very long time, all of us have struggled with our respective transitions towards a functioning democracy. During the process, we have been trapped and haunted by the past, but for the sake of the future generations, that must come to an end. We also must come to the realization that nobody will solve our problems. The international community can be a facilitator, but they cannot be more concerned with our issues than us. We need to engage in matters of our national interest more effectively and seek counsel and support when needed. We also need to put the past to rest and leave it to the historians, as politicians we must turn to the future for the sake of our youth. We must work to keep our talent here and to offer them opportunities. Progress and growth lies within human capital, fresh ideas and new talent—and we must find a way to retain it.

The background is a blue-tinted photograph of a white wall. In the upper left, there is a relief of a dove in flight. On the right, a balcony railing is visible. In the lower right, a piece of white fabric with a black geometric pattern hangs from the railing. The overall scene is brightly lit, with shadows cast on the wall.

POLITICAL TRENDS & DYNAMICS

OVERVIEW

THE AIM OF THIS SECTION IS TO BROADEN THE DISCOURSE ON PEACE AND STABILITY IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE AND TO PROVIDE 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.

The summer months are usually a period of political quiet in the Balkans as, amidst the often unbearable heat, both politicians and ordinary citizens switch into holiday mode, heading for the region's beaches or cooler corners and reducing regular activities to a minimum. In the sub-region of the "Yugosphere", the only exception to this is the cycle of celebrations and commemorations of anniversaries relating to the wars of the 1990s.

Given the reduced intensity of news, the summer months are a good time to reflect on particular issues and problems, such as the quality of political leadership and, indeed, its presence or absence in the region. Southeast Europe has never lacked strong leaders, but it has lacked good leadership, as, more often than not, strong leaders prioritize maintaining their personal strength and powerbases over moving their countries in a positive direction if, as is usually the case, this involves taking steps that could be politically costly.

When it comes to good leadership, a glimmer of hope is currently coming from Macedonia. The election of a new government led by Prime Minister Zoran Zaev of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), in coalition with several ethnic Albanian parties, has inserted a breath of fresh air – and hope – into a country which was becoming increasingly polarized as a result of the authoritarian and ethnically divisive rule of the formerly-governing VMRO-DPMNE. While much of the rest of the region seems to be sliding towards greater authoritarianism, Macedonia is bucking this trend. Aside from ushering in a more positive political climate within Macedonia, the new Zaev government has also hit the ground running when it comes to improving bilateral relations with neighbors. Thus, on August 1st Macedonia and Bulgaria signed a friendship treaty which, among other things, envisages closer Bulgarian support for Macedonia's EU and NATO accession processes, as well as improvements in trade and transport infrastructure. In parallel to this, the Macedonian government sought to initiate a thaw in relations with Greece, with the seeming goal of resolving the "name dispute" that is at the heart of tense relations between the two. The foreign ministers of the two countries pledged to revive talks on the "name dispute" during a meeting at the end



Western Balkans leaders in Albania: Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama (3 R), gathers with Prime Minister of Kosovo Isa Mustafa (R), Prime Minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabic (4 R), Prime Minister of Macedonia, Zoran Zaev (2 L), Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denis Zvizdic (3 L), Prime Minister of Montenegro, Dusko Markovic (2 R), European Union Commissioner Johannes Hahn (4 L) and World Bank's Europe and Central Asia region as Vice President, Cyril Muller as part of the informal meeting of Western Balkans countries' leaders to discuss deepening regional economic cooperation, in Durres, Albania on August 26, 2017. Photo: Anadolu Agency

of August, although there was a palpable sense that Athens had accepted Macedonia's newly-extended hand of friendship with some reservations and coolness.

If the Macedonian leadership was scoring small successes in thawing relations with the country's eastern and southern neighbors, this could not be said of relations with Serbia, its northern neighbor. While the removal of the increasingly erratic and authoritarian VMRO-DPMNE from power was welcomed across much of the region – and indeed Europe and North America – in Serbia it seemed to create a sense of irritation and barely veiled anger. Hardly surprising, argued many observers, given that Serbia's own centre-right and increasingly authoritarian regime, led by President Aleksandar Vucic, bore a strong resemblance to that of Gruevski and the VMRO-DPMNE in Macedonia. Vucic's own leadership style continued to mix flashes of the positive amid a sea of destructiveness. In an article for the national daily Blic, published at the end of July, Vucic called for an "internal dialogue" within Serbia regarding Kosovo, stating that the nation must "stop burying its head in the sand" and "try to be realistic" and reach a permanent solution to the conflict between Serbs and Albanians. The call was widely seen as an attempt by Vucic to begin preparing the Serbi-

an public for some kind of acceptance of Kosovo's proclaimed independence and the kind of legally binding treaty governing relations between Belgrade and Pristina which the EU had long been suggesting would be necessary in the next phase of normalizing relations. Many observers – particularly those outside Serbia – hailed the move, with some re-launching the idea that Vucic could yet turn out to be Serbia's De Gaulle. Yet while Vucic declaratively called for a domestic dialogue within Serbia, his venomous and hateful attacks on any and all opponents and critics within Serbia helped ensure that any genuine dialogue on this, as well as other issues, was all but impossible.

Meanwhile, Kosovo seemed to be struggling with a different kind of lack of leadership over the summer, as it struggled to cobble together a governing majority that could elect a new government. When it did elect a new government at the beginning of September, it was with the slimmest of majorities of one MP. Kosovo will, for the time being, be led by two veterans of the Kosovo Liberation Army – President Hashim Thaci and Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj. Yet most observers question the longevity of the new government. Meanwhile, a rising political star – Albin Kurti and his Vetevendosje (Self-determination) movement – await their moment. Kurti's pledges to sweep

Serbian President Vucic met in New York with Turkish president Erdogan in September. Photo: Anadolu Agency.



away Kosovo's existing corrupt politics excites many in Kosovo, yet his nationalism and rejection of the existing negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina are causing alarm outside of Kosovo, particularly within an international community which has invested heavily in moving it forward thus far.

An example of a truly "mixed bag" of leadership comes from Croatia perhaps. Since assuming the leadership of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) in July 2016 and the post of Prime Minister in October 2016, Andrej Plenkovic has moved the country and his party towards the political centre and away from the more right-wing course plotted by his predecessor, Tomislav Karamarko. This development came to the relief of most observers, other than Croatia's own far right itself. Yet Plenkovic has at times also appeared too cautious, particularly when it comes to confronting the same far-right. Thus, when a veterans group erected a plaque with the Croatian WWII fascist Ustaša salute "*Za dom spremni*" ("Ready for the Homeland") in the village of Jasenovac, next to the site of the notorious WWII concentration camp run by the Ustaša, Plenkovic's government did nothing, despite strong pressure from many quarters to have the plaque removed. Indeed, Plenkovic dithered, trying to kick the issue into the long grass, with several ministers in his government suggesting that dealing with the problem would await the work of a commission established to deal with the legacy of non-democratic regimes in Croatia. Only when his own junior coalition partners threatened to bring down the government did he take action of sorts, removing the plaque and moving it to a nearby town.

The prize for the most destructive leadership in the region probably goes to Turkey. Just over a year after the failed military coup of July 15th 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has successfully stabilized his regime. Yet this has come at the price of an unprecedented purge, conducted under the auspices of a state of emergency. A year later, Turkish democracy appears to be on its last legs, while the increasingly erratic and unpredictable nature of the regime is driving away many of the country's best educated citizens and investors, seriously damaging its economy.

GOVERNMENT FORMATION ...

After much uncertainty over who would form **Kosovo's** next government following the indecisive result of the Parliamentary elections held in June, a new government was elected in Pristina on September 9th. The new government is led by Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, as the candidate of the PAN coalition of parties which grew out of the KLA and which control 39 seats in the new Parliament. The new government will have a record five Deputy Prime Ministers and twenty-one Ministers, a reflection of the complex coalition building that was needed to cobble together a governing majority. The new government enjoys a majority of 61 MPs in the 120-seat Parliament, of which 20 are from parties representing Kosovo's ethnic minorities. The majority itself was only forged following the defection of the small New Kosovo Alliance, led by the businessman and now Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli, from the block around the LDK to the PAN coalition. Given its narrow majority, unwieldy make-up and difficult decisions that are expected of it, few analysts in Kosovo predicted that the government would be stable, or enjoy a long life.

No such fears were present in neighboring **Albania** meanwhile, where on September 13th a new government was also elected, once again under the leadership of Prime Minister Edi Rama. Albania's June Parliamentary elections delivered an absolute majority to Rama's Socialist Party, which won 74 seats in the 140 seat Parliament. Thanks to this, for the first time since 2001 a single party was able to form the Albanian government, without any coalition partners. The new Albanian Cabinet is the smallest in recent history, with only 15 ministers (12 with portfolios and 2 without). The creation of streamlined new "super-ministries" may help improve efficiency and coordination, yet these new ministries may also prove too unwieldy. Meanwhile, the decision to abolish the European Integration Ministry and merge it with the Foreign Ministry has raised some eyebrows, generating questions over how high a priority EU accession will be for the new government.

... AND COALITION COLLAPSE

While no governments have collapsed in the region over the last couple of months, **Bosnia** saw

a partial implosion of one of its ruling coalitions. On July 21st, the Bosniak Alliance for a Better Future (SBB) announced the break-up of its coalition with the other main Bosniak party in the country, the Party of Democratic Action (SDA). The SDA-SBB coalition was a key component of both the Federation entity government and the Central-level government. The dissolution of this coalition did not bring about the formal collapse of either government, as neither party's ministers resigned from the government, nor could one side find another political partner to replace the former with. Instead, both the Central and Federation entity governments entered into an even deeper state of paralysis than usual.

Prishtina, Kosovo, September 11: The new Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj officially takes office. Pictured with his predecessor, Isa Mustafa. Photo: Anadolu Agency.



ELECTIONS

While there was an entirely predictable absence of elections during the summer months, local elections are due to take place in Kosovo and Macedonia in October. In both cases there is more riding on their outcome than just control of local government.

Macedonia will hold local elections first, on October 15th, whose outcome could impact the national government in various ways. A strong performance among ethnic Macedonian voters by the now ruling Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) versus the formerly ruling VMRO-DPMNE could encourage the SDSM to opt for early elections in the spring in order to capitalize on new support and give the party a more comfortable majority in Parliament.

Meanwhile, the three Albanian parties currently in coalition with the SDSM – the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), the Alliance of Albanians, and Besa – will all be competing with each other for ethnic Albanian votes. As a result, the course of the local election campaigns – as well as consequent coalition building – carries the risk of destabilizing the national government. Yet even more destabilizing would be a surge in support for one of these parties compared to last year's Parliamentary elections, which could, similarly to the SDSM, encourage it to look favorably upon early Parliamentary elections.

Meanwhile, **Kosovo's** local elections will be held a week later, on October 22nd. In all likelihood, voters will probably distribute their support similarly to the way they did in June's Parliamentary elections. While the ruling parties, unlike in Macedonia, are unlikely to see a marked improvement in their performance, in Kosovo the real danger is that a further rise in support for Vetevendosje, coupled with a collapse in support for the ruling PAN coalition, could undermine the legitimacy of the current government and bring about its premature collapse.

Slovenia is facing presidential elections on October 22, 2017. President Borhut Pahor, who had been Prime Minister for the Social Democrats 2008–2012, stands a good chance at winning the first round of elections. He chose not to be nominated by the Social Democrats this time, but runs as an independent candidate. His main competitors are the independent major of Kramnik, Marjan Šarec, and the conservative candidate Ljudmila Novak, president of the Christian Democrat "Nova Slovenija" party. Although Borhut Pahor is in the lead, it is not at all clear whether he will be able to win the second round of elections.

SECURITY

On July 15th, **Turkey** marked the anniversary of the attempted military coup in 2016, which briefly plunged the country into chaos as a group of junior army officers attempted to overthrow the government and seize power. Although the coup in effect only lasted a few hours, the post-coup crackdown and purges being carried out by the authorities continue to the present day, as

does the state of emergency. In many respects, the previous year has transformed Turkey. An estimated 170,000 people – from army and police officers to lawmakers, journalists, academics or businessmen – have been arrested or detained during the purge, while hundreds of thousands are thought to have been fired or suspended from public sector jobs. While the purge has targeted those suspected being of Gulenists – who stand accused of being behind the coup – many seem to be ordinary opponents or critics of the regime. In April this year, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan organized a referendum which will enable him to expand his own presidential powers in major ways, at the expense of democratic checks and balances. One effect of the post-coup purge, as well as increasingly erratic behavior of the Turkish authorities – has been to drive both foreign and domestic investors out of Turkey. Many are now relocating to neighboring countries in the Balkans, as are an increasing number of ordinary Turkish citizens.

The US government's country terrorism reports, released on July 19th, provided a good scan of the preparedness and problems of different countries in the region in dealing with terrorist threats. Of all the countries in south-east Europe, perhaps the most worrying situation was that in **Turkey**, which the reports described as a both a source country for foreign terrorist fighters wishing to join the Islamic State and other Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq and a key transit country for those wishing to join terrorist groups across the Middle-East. An increasing domestic terrorism problem within Turkey was also noted, with nine known terrorism attacks during 2016 alone. Within the Balkans, **Bosnia** and **Kosovo** stuck out in terms of the scale of the problem faced, particularly as the two countries held leading positions in terms of numbers of recruits who had left to join Islamic state and other groups in Syria and Iraq. While Bosnian authorities estimated that around 300 of its citizens had left for the Middle-East conflicts, the number was estimated at 315 in Kosovo. The reports also noted that both countries had made progress in stemming the tide of recruits and prosecuting those engaged in terrorism or other extremist activities. Nevertheless, weak security and rule of law structures were highlighted, while in Bosnia, predictably, coordination between different levels of government was flagged up as an on-going problem.

In Montenegro, the trial of 14 individuals indicted on charges of planning a coup to overthrow the government last October finally began to make headway in early September. The trial had formally opened in May, but its start was formally delayed several times. Finally, on September 6th, the Prosecution began setting out its evidence against the accused, who include two Montenegrin opposition leaders. Both men continued to maintain that the charges against them were politically motivated, as well as that the entire coup had been invented by the authorities. Meanwhile, the US and Russia used the supposed coup to trade barbs in early August yet again – on a visit to Montenegro on August 2nd, US Vice President Mike Pence accused Russia of being behind the coup plot and seeking to destabilize the wider region; Moscow retorted that such accusations, as well as “false choices” that the US was offering to the region, would inevitably lead to a rise in tensions.

BILATERAL RELATIONS

Relations between **Moldova, Romania, and Russia** took a nosedive in late July and early August, as an internal Moldovan dispute escalated into a Moldova-Russia dispute and then engulfed Romania as well. While on July 19th Moldova’s pro-Russian President, Igor Dodon, announced that he had invited Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin to visit Moldova, after which Rogozin’s cabinet announced that the Russian Deputy PM would be visiting both Moldova and then its breakaway Transnistria region with a military delegation, Moldova’s own Foreign Ministry notified the Russian authorities that it would not allow a military delegation led by Rogozin to land in the country. Over the coming days, Rogozin and Dodon insisted that the visit would take place, with Dodon even stating that he would accompany Rogozin to Transnistria, much to the anger of Moldova’s pro-European government. In the end, Rogozin was forced to abandon his visit to Moldova on July 28th in mid-air, as Romanian authorities blocked his plane from entering their airspace, blocking his only viable access route to Chisinau. The Russian side retaliated by imposing temporary bans on the import of certain agricultural products from Romania and Moldova.

Given that for most of the summer Pristina had no government, it is not surprising that no tangible progress was made in the dialogue between **Serbia and Kosovo** during this period. However, some interesting developments did take place, not least of which was Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic’s call on July 24th for an internal dialogue within Serbia on how to resolve relations with Kosovo and, indeed, how to normalize relations between Albanians and Serbs as such. His call for realism on the Serbian side, as well as references to the need to take tough decisions, was welcomed by officials from the EU, as well as Kosovo and Albania and widely interpreted as a signal that Vucic was preparing the Serbian public for some form of acceptance of Kosovo’s independence. Opposition politicians and observers in Serbia were, of course, more skeptical of Vucic’s words – while some doubted the sincerity of the call for a dialogue given Vucic’s track record of communicating with his opponents, others stressed the need for action over words. Meanwhile, the presidents of Kosovo and Serbia met with the EU’s Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini on August 31st in Brussels and pledged their commitment to implementing existing agreements reached between Belgrade and Pristina on the judiciary by the middle of October. Their meeting was perhaps more interesting as an indication that the dialogue between the two sides may well be conducted at the presidential level in the future.

On August 1st, **Bulgaria and Macedonia** signed a friendship treaty in Skopje, in an attempt to thaw relations which had become cool during the last years of VMRO-DPMNE rule in Macedonia. The treaty envisages easing customs and border procedures, creating conditions for increased trade and improving transport infrastructure, as well as Bulgarian support for Macedonia’s EU and NATO accession bids. In addition, the treaty envisages the establishment of a commission that will seek to resolve the two countries’ differing views of history. The treaty was generally met with approval in the two countries and the region, although nationalists in both countries criticized it as selling out their country’s respective interests; by contrast, non-nationalist critics wondered whether any real concrete action would ensue from the treaty.

Following an ice-breaking visit by Macedonia’s new Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov to Ath-

ens in June, the foreign ministers of **Greece** and **Macedonia** held another meeting in Skopje on August 31st. Just how far the two countries are from signing a friendship treaty was demonstrated by the fact that the two ministers talked about the need for “trust-building measures” and plans to revive negotiations on their dispute over Macedonia’s very name. While it is clear that the chasm between Greece and Macedonia is far deeper – and will require much more hard work to overcome – the meeting was still a positive development and a step in the right direction towards resolving one of the region’s longest-running disputes.

On the other hand, while **Serbia** and **Macedonia** may have few substantive disputes and disagreements, along with traditionally warm relations, relations have soured since the election of the Zaev government in Skopje, to which the government in Belgrade appears to have adopted a hostile stance. In a bizarre move, on August 20th Serbia recalled the entire staff of its embassy in Skopje, the only justification eventually given being that Serbia was aware of “offensive actions” directed towards it and its embassy, as well as claims that Macedonian intelligence was spying in Serbian officials. Whatever the reasons behind this course of events, the dispute was papered over following a phone call between Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, as well as a meeting between the foreign ministers of the two countries during the ensuing days. Nevertheless, it was hard to shake off the feeling that there would likely be more such incidents in the future.

Kosovo and **Montenegro** seemed to be on course to reinvigorate their border demarcation dispute, rather than resolve it, as Kosovo’s new Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj, dismissed the entire Kosovar State Commission on Demarcation during his first days in office. The new

members of the Commission appointed by Haradinaj are bitter critics of the original demarcation agreement signed in 2015 and have been tasked with finding ways to revise the original agreement. Yet given that Montenegro has little incentive to engage in a revision of the agreement and that the international community has insisted that Kosovo ratify the agreement, it seems that all that Kosovo may achieve is to further box itself in on a dead-end course. Croatia also found itself engulfed in numerous bilateral and multilateral disputes with its neighbors over the summer. Sparks flew between **Bosnia** and **Croatia** as Zagreb forged ahead with plans to construct the Peljesac bridge, which would enable Croatia to connect its disjointed southern territories while bypassing Bosnia. Bosnian officials challenged the legality of the bridge regarding concern about open sea access, arguing that it could not be built without Sarajevo’s consent. There were additional diplomatic skirmishes between the two countries when Croatia’s President Grabar-Kitanovic suggested that Bosnia was a haven for “an estimated ten thousand” radical Islamists, a claim which was rejected by Bosnia’s security officials as their Croatian counterparts. Relations between **Hungary** and **Croatia** also seemed in danger of souring after Budapest threatened to block Croatia’s accession to the OECD over an ongoing dispute over Hungarian oil company MOL’s ownership in Croatia’s national oil company INA. Relations between **Slovenia** and **Croatia** also remained tense, primarily over their border dispute in the Bay of Piran. Slovenia cited this as a reason for blocking Croatian accession to the OECD. Meanwhile, for a brief period of time in early August, **Croatia** managed to antagonize four of its Balkan neighbors – **Bosnia**, **Macedonia**, **Montenegro**, and **Serbia** – following a decision to drastically increase fees on imports of fruits and vegetables. As the neighboring countries threatened retaliation, Croatia quickly backed down.

A Macedonian Moment for the Balkans?

*Florian Bieber*¹

After years of democratic decline in the Western Balkans, the new Macedonian government that took office in May 2017 constituted not just the first democratic transfer of power in the region for four years, but also a seeming break with the success of autocratic rule. Is there a “Macedonian moment” and what can be learnt from it? First a warning, the electoral success of Aleksandar Vucic in 2012 was by many seen as democratic normalization and a sign of Serbia’s democracy maturing. Instead, the state of media freedom and democracy has regressed significantly since. In Albania, the success of Edi Rama helped to break the nationalist and autocratic temptations of the Berisha governments. The record of the Rama government, reelected just this year, has been mixed: on one side, it succeeded in significant reforms, on the other, the dominance of a single self-centered prime minister does not bode well.

These recent transfers of power stand as a warning to not just focus on people and their ability to “deliver”, but rather on structural changes that make government more transparent and accountable. To some degree the new Macedonian government holds more promise as Prime Minister Zaev cuts a less charismatic leadership figure than Vucic or Rama and his power is based less on a hierarchical pyramid of power. The Macedonian transfer of power holds two lessons for the wider region. The first is on the transfer of power itself and the second is on the aftermath. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the buzzword for democratic change in the Balkans and beyond was “electoral revolution”, the change of an autocratic regime through a decisive election. This helped Meciar’s nationalist thuggishness in Slovakia in 1998, and ended the corrupt and nationalist Tudjman regime in Croatia in 2000 and the war-mongering Milosevic in the same year. Here the focus was on a broad opposition coalition that would overthrow the incumbent in an election, monitored by civil society with strong social movements and international support.

The record of these transitions has been varied. Slovakia and Croatia did relatively well, Serbia had a mixed record, but the break with Milosevic was decisive and liberating. Further east, in Ukraine or Georgia, the outcome was less clear cut, at least after an initial fury of reforms. The new generation of autocrats has been able to control electoral processes better than their predecessors and have also, for the most part been less antagonistic to the West. Thus, unseating them required a different strategy. In Macedonia, it required a nearly two year long process that not only brought the undemocratic practices of the government to light to a domestic audience, but also gradually convinced the EU and key member states that the government seized being a partner (although some members of the EPP continued supporting the incumbent VMRO-DPMNE until after the elections in 2016). A combination of external pressure, such as the Priebe Report, the EU mediation that set up the special prosecutor, large scale social movements and protests led to a change of government that only took place after intense international pressure following the violence in parliament orchestrated by the governing party in April 2017. Thus, unseating autocratic incumbents in the region will require a similar mix of revelation, mobilization, external pressure, and a critical juncture.

Such a Macedonian moment is increasingly becoming the only path toward renewing democratic rule in several Balkan countries. Key for long term change and transforming the “Macedonian moment” into a lasting legacy requires more than a change of leadership or new parties in power. From Milorad Dodik in the Republika Srpska in 2006 to Vucic in 2012, too often the hope of Western actors in particular was pinned on finding the next reliable, reformist sounding partner. The result has been supporting the current generation of strongmen, who talk of reform when it suits them, but building a highly personalized sentimental control. Key for sustainable change will be strengthening institutions over people and the willingness of the new Macedonian government to building professional and transpar-

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ent institutions and to break the power of patronage networks that are the main transmission belts between politics and citizens across the region. It is easy to conjure up the image of a generational change, yet the autocratic incumbents are often young, from Vucic and Gruevski, both 47 years old, to Milo Djukanovic, 55 years old. All came to power in their twenties and thirties, reminding us that youth is no protection from autocracy and even less from long rule.

The biggest failure of the democrats in the 2000s across the region was the failure to build and respect institutions and rules, often with the tacit consent and encouragement from outsiders. The informal presidentialism of Boris Tadic, the dubious coalition building in Kosovo and informal power of Milo Djukanovic, just to list a few examples, all preventing the emergence of strong institutions and rules that are not easily bent.

Finally, making the "Macedonian moment" sustainable also will require a new type of party politics. To date, most parties in the region have been essentially interests groups focused on gaining and maintaining power with only formal adherence to European type ideological distinctions. Overwhelmingly, these differences are superficial, pro-forma and purely instrumental. The result has been that parties are deeply distrusted and joined to get a job not to pursue a political commitment. Just following an external template and focusing on the form is not going to deliver.

Thus, thinking of new types of party politics will be necessary. One promising start was the election campaign in Macedonia's most recent parliamentary election where the social democratic opposition sought to actively court Albanian voters and included candidates from the social movements against the government. Moving beyond the still too rigid ethnic divides in politics of the region and also including civil society are opportunities, as long as both do not evolve into tokenism and mere co-option. This transformation is all the more challenging as the Western European model of political parties is itself in deep crisis as populist groups and "movements" seek to bypass conventional party politics. The Western Balkans had their share of populists, flash-in-the-pan candidates, and nationalists. However, without parties which are based on internal democracy and shared values and programs, such easy temptations that might turn into long autocratic hangovers remain likely. Thus, the "Macedonian moment" is a reminder that it is an opportunity for a much longer and more uncertain transformation that awaits not just Macedonia, but most of its neighbors.

Our Beloved, Feared Balkan Leaders

Sašo Ordanoski²

Most current Balkan leaders, submerged in our semi-functional and “work-in-progress” (or “work-in-regress”) democracies, are faced with a classical Machiavelli’s authoritarian dilemma: whether it is better for a ruler to be feared or loved. Machiavelli’s solution to that ancient leader’s puzzle is that it is better to be feared than loved since, in politics, fear is easier to control than the whims of love. The major caveat in Machiavelli’s advice is that a prince must be feared only in such a way as to avoid being hated – and the way to do so is to abstain from meddling with the property of his subjects.

In the modern leadership conundrum of Southeast Europe, there appear to be two options. To be loved, governing democratically and respecting rule of law, though this may cause a leader to seem weak and politically vulnerable; or to govern through fear, not respecting rule of law (meddling with citizens’ property), but stimulating respect and loyalty among ones faithful citizens. Machiavelli’s advice notwithstanding, it seems that the majority of leaders are choosing the latter track.

Personalized Power

In choosing to govern by fear, most leaders in Southeast Europe have personalized their power instead of empowering institutions; institutions serve merely as decorum, reminiscent of a now non-existent rule of law. Such leaders rely on corruption, cronyism, and the development of widespread political and social clienteles. Their political parties become a backbone of the state’s institutional and administrative structures, tarnishing the concept of integrity of all key and supposedly independent democratic and state institutions. These include the judicial system, police, financial establishments, cadastres, business associations, university bodies, and tax authorities, but also sport clubs and their fans, folk dance groups, and religious choruses, all of whom must obey party lines and its leader.

Yes, most of our Balkan leaders are populists, because the offer of “growth without democracy and progress without freedom” (in the words of Michael Ignatieff) appears to attract a lot of popular support from people, unused to, expelled from, or tired of the obligations of individual citizenship in democratic societies. This democratic vacuum is filled by populists who, in the terminology of Wolfgang Merkel, re-engage “the bottom third” of societies who have “disengaged from politics” as a result of “triumph of capitalism” with abolition of democratic and sovereign control over national economies under the advancement of globalization and neo-liberal market forces . By addressing the worries of ordinary people, our populist leaders bring passion back to politics, fed by a simplified and revisionist version of history which informs a grand narrative of a people and their land. Take, for example, the case of the ex-Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski’s ten years-strong (and very expensive!) propaganda bravado about Biblical peoples and “Alexander the Great’s modern nation.”

“Militarizing” The Media

However, this modern populism is distinct of that from of the nineties, in which nationalism was the dominant school of thought. Most of our modern Balkan autocrats have become technologically savvy and politically sophisticated, using social media and modern PR techniques better than most of their competitors in the political arena. They have also adopted the technocratic skills of the new globalized

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democratic world where efficiency dominated over processes of checks and balances, and debates about values are replaced with spreadsheets showing statistical trends in their support in public polls.

Still, controlling the media in their countries is a crucial tool for contemporary Balkan “democratic” despots in their conscious choice of governing “by fear.” Their propagandistic target is simple: to demonstrate that government is strong and not necessarily good (to paraphrase Haifeng Huang), and that there is no better leadership figure available in society – they are the only option.

Through systematic media manipulation (as declining scores in the region in the IREX Media Sustainability Index and Press Freedom Index show), autocrats intimidate their political opponents and everyone who is critical of their power. Coupled with total control over the security state apparatus, this leads to a “militarization” of media content, where the public is overwhelmed with press briefings and “live” broadcasts of arrests (prep-shows), “attractive” official video materials of police actions, tips on police investigations, news exclusivities on their opponents’ personal affairs, including sex, drugs and video tapes. Ruling political parties have employed armies of internet bots and web trolls, whose target is anyone and everyone who disagrees with their party line or the standing of the party’s “supreme leader.”

The Rest Is History

Most of the above diagnoses, applicable in more than several Southeast European countries, are inspired by the reality of Macedonian political experience in the last decade of rule by former-PM Nikola Gruevski, until recently the most powerful and unrestrained despot in Macedonian politics. But things changed in 2015, when Zoran Zaev, the leader of the Macedonian opposition party, the Social Democrats, publicly exposed some of the cruder methods of Gruevski’s rule by releasing hundreds of wire-tapped conversations that the Macedonian secret police service and its chief (Gruevski’s first cousin) had illegally tapped on a continual basis since 2009. The recordings illustrated high-level corruption, systematic election rigging, judiciary misuse, political manipulations, racketeering, and numerous other mismanagements on an unprecedented level of government abuse.

The rest is now history: not even an attempt for a bloody, but unsuccessful coup in Macedonian parliament in April 2017 could have stopped Gruevski’s demise. The formation of the new Macedonian inter-ethnic coalition government in June this year was led by Mr. Zaev and had the strong support of civil society. Currently deprived of his passport while the under investigation by the Special Prosecutor for a long list of suspected crimes during his governance, Gruevski is facing losses in the local elections this coming October. A rising sentiment in his own VMRO-DPMNE calls for him to finally leave the party’s presidential function and allow for internal party reforms.

New, Forgotten Leadership

PM Zaev, on the other hand, so far, is showing leadership qualities as yet unseen in Macedonian politics. He, himself pledging to “bring back life in Macedonia” regardless of anyone’s ethnic, social, or political background, is not short of some quantity of populism in his political program. However, he announced a wide range of reforms in the country in close cooperation with the EU and Euro-Atlantic structures, conscious of the fact that by tolerating Gruevski’s undemocratic regime for too long, they were part of the problem as much as they are now an important part of the solution for Macedonian social, political, and democratic restoration.

In that process, PM Zaev insists on wide public debate involving experts, civil society, and all political sides including the opposition. He and his government officials have made themselves constantly available for journalists’ inquiries, and responded even to unpleasant questions posed by the media, including his harshest critics close to the opposition. He demonstrates restraint in using the power of the state

in his party activities. In the ongoing local elections campaign, current ministers and other state officials involved in the political campaign are using their own transport to party activities (heretofore unimaginable). The ruling coalition is advocating for a balanced but firm approach in re-establishing juridical independence, social and tax reforms, redefining police (and secret police) functions in society, freedom of the media, domestic and foreign investments, and rule of law.

The list of political and other reforms which are on the table for Macedonia is both long and long overdue. We'll see for how long the new leadership, challenged with difficult task of socio-economic reforms and the Euro-Atlantic integration agenda, will remain dedicated to the interests of the country, a rule based on love rather than by bolstering fear among its citizens. The jury, on Zoran Zaev, is out.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Southeast Europe

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