



BALKAN NEWS



In this issue:

- Judiciary in Bosnia and Herzegovina 02
- Erdogan and the Balkans 02
- The European butterfly effect toward North Macedonia 03
- Serbia's deal with the EEU 04
- Elections in Kosovo 04
- What's next? 05

Judiciary in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Federica Woelk

In BiH there is no political momentum: since the general elections last year, there is neither a government nor a functioning Parliament. Despite enormous efforts for judicial reform and massive assistance, there are no impressive results in the judiciary, e.g. prominent indictments or trials regarding corruption or organized crime. Therefore, in November 2019, the EU will organize a major Rule of Law event in Sarajevo, involving citizens and civil society organizations. Their demands for justice shall confront the authorities, the legislator and politicians with a bottom-up view. Instead of only negotiating with elites and leaders of political parties, the EU wants to reach out directly to citizens, making their voices heard. It is an experiment, but worth trying, as the country has been totally blocked for years due to the preference of all actors for the status quo. The results will feed into a report on the judicial system in BiH which is due in December.



After months of discussion within the tripartite presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serbia-Bosnia highway and its 1.3-kilometer bridge over the Sava river were finally launched on 8 October, in the presence of President Erdogan. The Serbian section will be built and partially funded by Turkey, whose investments in the Western Balkans have quadrupled within fourteen years. Over the past years, Ankara has benefited from the privatisation of the economy and has become a major shareholder in several infrastructures such as Kosovo Electricity Distribution Company, the Albanian telecommunication company or B&H Airlines. Erdogan's visit to Serbia served as an opportunity to conclude bilateral agreements with President Vucic on defence, industry and technology cooperation.

Yet, Erdogan's plans in the region cannot be described in economic terms only. Turkey is committed to showing itself as a key player in the regional reconciliation process and the economic development on the basis of a common culture. « Due to its historical, human, religious and cultural roots, Turkey is itself a Balkan country », President Erdogan claimed in July this year. This did not prevent Erdogan from supporting EU and NATO membership of Balkans countries. Turkey's strategy was indeed to smooth the Erdogan-centred neo-Ottoman renaissance by raising the Atlanticism card... but for how long? What if Turkey decides to become a credible alternative, while the EU member states are turning their backs?

The European butterfly effect towards North Macedonia

Grégoire Soria



On October 15, the Council of the European Union ended up divided towards the opening of accession talks in the Western Balkans. France, along with the Netherlands and Denmark, blocked the opening of accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania. Despite support from Germany, and most of the EU countries (mainly post-2004 members), Skopje and Tirana faced critics from French European Affairs Minister, Amélie de Montchalin.

More progress is needed in both countries, but foremost, deep reforms are to be made in the Commission's way of conducting negotiations. These are the arguments justifying the postponing of negotiations talks to May 2020, at the EU-Western Balkan summit of Zagreb. This refusal strengthens the risk of lassitude in the region. Disappointment is high in North Macedonia and Albania, regarding the efforts made over the past years. In Skopje, the signal has been received with disapproval, especially regarding the deep effort made by the government to end the name dispute with Greece (Prespa agreement). Consequently, last Saturday October 19, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, facing a growing political crisis, called for a "swift snap election". Political timidity, coming from a core EU member state, provoked a butterfly effect that has destabilized North Macedonia's achievements.

Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "France Sinks EU Hopes of North Macedonia, Albania", Balkan Insight, 18 oct. 2019, URL: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/18/france-sinks-eu-hopes-of-north-macedonia-albania/>

Georgi Gotev, "France halts EU enlargement", Euractiv.com, 16 oct. 2019, URL: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/france-halts-eu-enlargement/?fbclid=IwAR3qDUXdzAv6DgSKNGDEmDH8OQAgRedZh8KXznK8-UH36yni77HuuYzjHao>

Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "North Macedonia Prime Minister Calls for Snap Elections", Balkan Insight, 19 oct. 2019, URL: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/19/north-macedonia-prime-minister-calls-for-snap-elections/>

Serbia's deal with the EEU

Louise Guillon

Despite the EU's warning, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic signed a free trade deal with the Eurasian Economic Union last Friday. Belgrade's agreement consists in harmonising the existing bilateral agreements with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia and creating similar ones with Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Serbian goods will access a market of 183 million people with lower import duties and additional favourable terms. Yet, this free trade agreement might not be compatible with the EU membership Serbia is applying for. Exit clause and specific provisions regarding the compliance with the European acquis should therefore be considered according to EU German MP David McAllister. Complementary with the EU path? This is at least the narrative Serbia is promoting, arguing that Brussels shall support a stronger Serbia.

Elections in Kosovo

Grejs Gjergji

The early parliamentary elections of 6 October 2019 in Kosovo were very important on different levels for the political life in the country. Firstly, the elections were important because the winning party, the Auto-determination Movement, a social democratic movement, will be for the first time in power after achieving a coalition with LDK, a center-right political party. For many, the possibility for M.Albin Kurti in power is a change for the whole region, influencing social policies and economic growth much needed for all of the countries of the Western Balkans [1]. For others, he is the most important figure in the country since independence for ending corruption [2].

These elections were seen as a punishment of the political elite who governed the country after the war without making the needed changes in Kosovo, not meeting the expectations to deal with internal and external challenges, and being corrupt. Second, these elections were marked by incidents of votes coming by Serbia where the vote counters were poisoned and ended up in hospital (case being under investigation) [3], marking also the urgent necessity of reaching a final agreement with Serbia and the final normalization of relations between the two countries where the final recognition of Kosovo will be a must.

[1] <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/kosovo-wahlsieger-albin-kurti-setzt-auf-radikalen-wandel-a-1290489.html>

[2] <https://top-news1.com/bugajski-challenges-awaiting-albin-kurti-and-kosovo/>

[3] <https://www.koha.net/zgjedhjet-2019/190357/dnv-kerkon-nga-kqz-ja-qe-te-mos-beje-verifikimin-e-zarfeve-nga-serbia-pa-ardhur-rezultatet-e-hetimit/>

What's next?

08.11 7pm - BALKAN TALK No 1

Joan De Lara's presentation about the work of "Camins" (Paths in Catalan), an NGO engaged in migrants' issues in the Western Balkans. Joan will share his experience in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovia.

Mid November - FILM SCREENING

In the Land of Blood and Honey is 2011 war film produced and written by Angelina Jolie. During the siege of Sarajevo, former lovers find themselves in opposing camps...

January - HIGH-LEVEL LECTURE

High-level lecture on North Macedonia and Albania's perspective in the EU. 2019 has been a year of remarkable development for the recently named "North" Macedonia. The resolution of the name dispute with Greece, and integration into NATO, has broadened horizons in Skopje. In Tirana, the EU perspective has provided real incentives for internal reforms. But one issue still has to be addressed: the EU accession process.

Panelists are yet to be confirmed throughout November.

