

# STRATEGIC BALKANS

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**Date:** 2 October 2017

**Title:** King of the skies: Russia starts delivering MiG-29 warplanes to Serbia

**Author:**

**Source:** Sputnik

**Key words:** Balkans, Serbia, Russia, military equipment.

**Link:** <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201710021057868575-russia-serbia-fighter-jets-mig29/>

### **Summary**

Russia has just began the first delivery of six Mikoyan MiG-29 fighter jets to Serbia, in the context of military-technical cooperation. All of the fighter jets will be delivered by October 6. The deal had been agreed on December 2016 between the then-Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. Aside from the six fighter jets, the deal includes the delivery of 30 T-72s tanks and 30 BRDM-2 armored reconnaissance vehicles. The first military transport aircraft loaded with disassembled Russian Mikoyan MiG-29 fighter jets was scheduled to take off from the Moscow Region at noon on Monday. The assembling of the fighter jets will take part in Serbia with the assistance of Russian experts, whilst the Serbian pilots in charge of flying these planes have received additional training in Russia. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has been invited to the parade, scheduled on October 20, where the MiG-29 will be first demonstrated.

**Date:** 3 October 2017

**Title:** The Balkans: Children repeatedly abused

**Author:**

**Source:** Médecins Sans Frontières

**Key words:** Balkans, Serbia, Srebrenica trial

**Link:** <http://www.msf.org/en/article/balkans-children-repeatedly-abused-border-authorities>

### **Summary**

In a new report titled “Games of Violence”, Médecins Sans Frontières exposes the violence to which children and young people continue to experience by European Union Member State border authorities and the police on Serbia’s borders with Hungary, Bulgaria and Croatia present young people. “For more than a year our doctors and nurses have continued to hear the same, repetitive story of young people being beaten, humiliated, and attacked with dogs for desperately trying to continue their journeys”. The numbers are worrying. A total of 92% of children and teenagers present in the MSF clinics report physical abuse perpetrated mostly by the Bulgarian, Hungarian and Croatian border authorities. Almost half these children singled out Bulgarian authorities. In Belgrade, there have been 62 incidents of intentional violence at the Hungarian border and 24 on the Croatian border, following the patterns of beatings, dog bites and the use of irritant spray.

**Date:** 4 October 2017

**Title:** Landmark Srebrenica trial to resume in Serbia

**Author:** Associated Press

**Source:** Fox News

**Key words:** Balkans, Serbia, Srebrenica trial

**Link:** <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/10/04/landmark-srebrenica-trial-to-resume-in-serbia.html>

### **Summary**

The Srebrenica trial involving eight former Bosnian Serb police officers charged to taking part in the 1995 massacre can finally resume following a prior suspension. Around 8,000 Muslim men and boys were killed by Bosnian Serb troops in Srebrenica. A Serbian appeals court, led by the new prosecutor, Snezana Stanojkovic, filed the request for the reopening of the proceeding, after that it was halted in July because charges in the case had been filed at a time when Serbia was without a chief war crimes prosecutor. Eventhough no date has been immediately set for future hearings, this is an important step in the right direction. The trial is a test for Serbia's pledge in punishing war criminals, an important step to formally seek European Union membership and to improve the relations within the Balkan States more than two decades after the Bosnian war.

**Date:** 4 October 2017

**Title:** The western Balkans: A region of secession

**Author:** Thomas Rosner

**Source:** Deutsche Welle

**Key words:** Balkans, secession, Catalan referendum

**Link:** <http://www.dw.com/en/the-western-balkans-a-region-of-secessions/a-40793126>

### **Summary**

The Catalan referendum is ringing alarming bells in the Balkans. It's reviving memories from the violent breakup of Yugoslavia of the early 1990's, and it's fueling the efforts of those leaders in the region that are pushing for secession and independence. In Serbia, the province of Vojvodina is requesting more autonomy from Belgrade, and all the regional offices of the LSV (League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina) raised the flag of Catalonia in support of the Spanish region. In Croatia, the local autonomist party "List for Rijeka" is asking to condemn the "brutal violence perpetrated by the Spanish police against Catalan citizens"; whilst on the Croatian website Index.hr people are asking, "does Istria have the right to independence from Croatia?". The threats of secessions are most alarming in Bosnia-Herzegovina, were Bosnian Croats are demanding an entity of their own, meanwhile, Bosnia's Serb leader, Mirolad Dodik, has been threatening to hold a referendum on secession for years now. However, the independence of Balkan countries has not changed the economic situation of the region, as Slovenia is the only country to boast higher standard of living than in the Yugoslav era.

**Date:** 12 October 2017

**Title:** Albania, the Prime Minister wants Europe: “The EU can guarantee peace and prosperity”

**Author:** Vincenzo Nigro

**Source:** Repubblica

**Key words:** Balkans, Albania, Italy, EU

**Link:**

[http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2017/10/12/news/intervista\\_edi\\_rama\\_premier\\_albanese\\_albania\\_e\\_europeista\\_nei\\_balcani\\_ricordo\\_della\\_guerra\\_ancora\\_vivo-178038659/?ref=search](http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2017/10/12/news/intervista_edi_rama_premier_albanese_albania_e_europeista_nei_balcani_ricordo_della_guerra_ancora_vivo-178038659/?ref=search)

**Summary**

“Albania and Albanians remain the most pro-European country and people in Europe”, with this statement the newly re-elected Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, begins his visit to Italy. The Prime Minister reflects upon the fact that the Balkan wars and the Albanian communist regime are still vivid memories for his people, and highlights the important role of the EU, an alliance born to bring peace within countries that have fought for centuries. When asked about the role of Russia and Turkey in the region, he answers that Albanians see Turkey as a State that is part of the region, and that is trying to play its role without imposing anything in the Balkans, as it is a country tied to the euro-Atlantic prospective. As for Russia, Prime Minister Rama, identifies that it exists a tie between Russia and the Slavic population in the Balkans, however Russia uses this tie in favor of its geostrategic interests; it plays in the Balkans to improve its standing and influence at the global level. Furthermore, the Prime Minister highlights the important balance role that the U.S. needs to play in the region.

**Date:** 17 October 2017

**Title:** Russia pressures Serbia on status of controversial base

**Author:**

**Source:** San Francisco Chronicle

**Key words:** Balkans, Serbia, Russia.

**Link:** <http://www.sfchronicle.com/news/world/article/Russia-pressure-Serbia-on-status-of-12283660.php>

**Summary**

Serbia continues to foster its military, economic and other ties with Russia, at the same time, its formally seeking EU membership. A risky game that is bringing attention to the “Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center” in the southern city of Nis. U.S. officials believe that this center could become a Kremlin’s spy base, whilst Moscow claims that the center is only for humanitarian missions; however, it is increasing the pressure on Belgrade to grant diplomatic status to the Russian staff present in the facility. Furthermore, the center is located close to Serbia’s border with NATO member Bulgaria and Kosovo, which houses a large American military base and the Western Alliance’s peacekeeping troops. The Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alexander Chepurin urged Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic to resolve the status of the center as soon as possible, whilst Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said that “neither Moscow nor Washington will influence her government’s decision on the center’s status”.

**Date:** 18 October 2017

**Title:** EU special summit on migration and the Balkans in May 2018 in Sofia

**Author:**

**Source:** Die Presse

**Key words:** Balkans, migration, EU.

**Link:** <http://diepresse.com/home/ausland/aussenpolitik/5305192/EUSondergipfel-zu-Migration-und-Balkan-im-Mai-2018-in-Sofia?from=suche.intern.portal>

### Summary

Bulgaria will host the 2018 EU special summit on migration in May 2018. However, prior to this meeting, EU Council President Donald Tusk wants to agree on the internal and external aspects of EU migration policy in Brussels on Friday [20<sup>th</sup> of October]. This is not an easy task, as hardly anyone likes the quota system. According to diplomats, the negotiations are “the most difficult issue with regard to a mandatory quota system for accepting refugees”. It is already known that Hungary will reject the EU redistribution plan regarding 50,000 refugees, and Austria too will not participate according to statements by the Minister of Interior Wolfgang Sobotka. A Summit Declaration states that while progress has been made on the EU asylum package, a proper balance between responsibility and solidarity is needed, furthermore, more efficient deportations measures are needed in the fight against illegal migration. Finally, the position of Turkey has also been debated, with two different stands. The first that wants to tighten the line towards Ankara, and the other that welcomes the collaboration with Turkey.

**Date:** 18 October 2017

**Title:** Ratko Mladic, the “butcher of the Balkans”, will receive his judgment on November 22

**Author:** AFP

**Source:** Libération

**Key words:** ICTY, Genocide, War crimes, Bosnia, Serbia

**Link:** [http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/10/18/ratko-mladic-le-boucher-des-balkans-fixe-sur-son-sort-le-22-novembre\\_1603992](http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/10/18/ratko-mladic-le-boucher-des-balkans-fixe-sur-son-sort-le-22-novembre_1603992)

### Summary

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) will issue a judgment on November 22 against former Bosnian-Serb military leader Ratko Mladic, accused of genocide and war crimes during the Bosnian conflict. The 74-year-old military chief, known as the "Balkan butcher", will face a verdict on the 11 charges against him, a few weeks before the final closure of the ICTY, scheduled on December 31, 2017. Ratko Mladic is being prosecuted for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed during the Bosnian war, which left more than 100,000 dead and 2.2 million displaced between 1992 and 1995. On its website, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia says it has "radically transformed the landscape of international humanitarian law and allowed victims to be heard, to testify the atrocities and to describe their suffering."

**Date:** 24 October 2017

**Title:** Serbian judges take oath in Kosovo

**Author:** Le Figaro.fr and AFP

**Source:** Le Figaro

**Key words:** Minority, Serbia, Kosovo, Judicial system, Normalization

**Link:** <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2017/10/24/97001-20171024FILWWW00222-des-juges-serbes-pretent-serment-au-kosovo.php>

### Summary

For the first time in history, forty judges and thirteen prosecutors belonging to the Serbian minority living in northern Kosovo have accepted to swear an oath before the authorities of Kosovo. Serbia, which since 2008 has refused to recognize the independence of its former province, has been supporting a parallel system of justice in the country, in the areas where the Serbian minority lives. The majority of Serbs living in Kosovo, around 120,000, 40,000 of them in the northern sector of Mitrovica, offers allegiance to Belgrade, not to Pristina. "I welcome your desire to join Kosovo's justice system and work in accordance with Kosovo law," said Hashim Thaçi, who presided over the oath in Pristina. This is in line with an agreement reached in 2015 in the framework of the Serbia-Kosovo discussions on the normalization of their relations, under the auspices of the European Union.

**Date:** 26 October 2017

**Title:** Witness implicates Russian suspect in Montenegro coup plot

**Author:** Predrag Milic

**Source:** Washington Post

**Key words:** Balkans, Montenegro, coup, Russia.

**Link:** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/witness-implicates-russian-suspect-in-montenegro-coup-plot/2017/10/26/bdf7ed90-ba41-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.9c9732dd1a2d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/witness-implicates-russian-suspect-in-montenegro-coup-plot/2017/10/26/bdf7ed90-ba41-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22_story.html?utm_term=.9c9732dd1a2d)

### Summary

A key witness (Aleksandar Sindjelic) in the trial of 14 suspected plotters that tried to topple Montenegro's government directly implicated a Russian secret service agent (Eduard Shishmakov) as responsible for organizing the coup attempt by supplying money and defining goals to prevent Montenegro from joining NATO. The witness was meant to organize 500 people to trigger disturbances in Podgorica on the day of last year's parliamentary election, in order to remove Milo Djukanovic from power, "dead or alive". The 14 defendants are mostly Serb, whilst two Russians, identified as Shishmakov and Vladimir Popov, are charged with terrorism and are being tried in absentia. Sindjelic states: "in 2016, I received a strange message from Edi (Eduard) when he said 'enough of this, the people should go to streets and overthrow Djukanovic, that criminal gang. [...] we have information that Montenegro wants to enter NATO, and if the opposition doesn't win the election, the parliament will vote for the country's membership and there will be no way back'".

**Date:** 28 October 2017

**Title:** Jacques Rupnik: Catalonia-Balkans, a mutual inspiration

**Author:** Jacques Rupnik

**Source:** Le Monde

**Key words:** Catalonia, Puigdemont, Yugoslavia, Independence, Nationalist conflicts

**Link:** [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/10/28/catalogne-balkans-une-inspiration-mutuelle\\_5207291\\_3232.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/10/28/catalogne-balkans-une-inspiration-mutuelle_5207291_3232.html)

### Summary

The break-up of Yugoslavia, which has remained synonymous of "balkanisation" and nationalist conflicts, has long been a source of inspiration for Catalan independence leaders. On the other hand, the declaration of independence of Catalonia gives rise to contrasting interpretations in the Balkans, and awakens the desires of nationalists unhappy of the map of post-Yugoslavia territories. Puigdemont, who had visited Slovenia in 1991, closely observed the steps towards independence a referendum in December 1990, a declaration at the end of June 1991, which provoked a brief failed attempt of the army to regain control. Then, in early July, a European mediation providing for a three-month moratorium on the independence of Slovenia and Croatia and on the use of force by Belgrade. On October 8, Slovenia reaffirmed and implemented its independence. Here is what, in a way, was the "model" for Catalan separatists.

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