

# STRATEGIC BALKANS

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**Date:** 9 January 2018

**Title:** Accessions of the Balkan countries planned from 2025

**Author:** Daniel Sorabji

**Source:** Die Presse

**Key words:** Balkans, EU, integration, reforms

**Link:** <https://diepresse.com/home/ausland/eu/5350692/Beitritte-der-Balkanlaender-ab-2025-geplant?from=suche.intern.portal>

### **Summary**

The European Commission will declare that the six candidate countries from the Balkans should gradually become members of the Union starting from 2025. The draft paper from the Commission states: “With strong political will, the implementation of real reforms and lasting solutions to disputes with neighbors, Montenegro and Serbia should be ready for membership in 2025”. At the request of the press, the authorities in Brussels are careful to ascertain that this isn’t a fixed target date, but the best possible scenario. The objective of this communication, to be presented on February 7, is to increase the pressure for reform in the countries mentioned, as well as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo. For the first time since the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, the European Union members will meet with all the candidate countries in Sofia, in May 2018.

**Date:** 11 January 2018

**Title:** Bulgaria puts reforms aside to focus on EU presidency

**Author:** Tony Barber

**Source:** Financial Times

**Key words:** Balkans, Bulgaria, EU, Boyko Borisov, Russia

**Link:** <https://www.ft.com/content/22f89dd6-d6ce-11e7-ae3e-563c04c5339a>

### **Summary**

Bulgaria is experiencing a period of relative political calm within the government – composed by a coalition of center-right and rightwing nationalist parties – and between the government and the Socialist opposition. Indeed, no one is willing to embarrass the nation that is now at the center of the European stage. “The nationalist right won’t disrupt the ruling coalition,” predicts Kancho Stoychev, head of Gallup International, a pollster. The Socialist too do not want to cause problems. “The coalition is strong enough to hold off the Socialists. Besides, even the Socialists don’t want to throw the Bulgarian EU presidency under the bus,” says one diplomat. Boyko Borisov, the current Prime Minister of Bulgaria, is taking advantage of this situation. Ognian Shentov, a political scientist at the Center for the Study of Democracy think-tank in Sofia says: “Borisov doesn’t want to make any waves during Bulgaria’s EU presidency. Over the next six months, anything that could make people unhappy or cause street protests will be avoided.” At the same time, Russia is coming back on the scene.

**Date:** 13 January 2018

**Title:** Kosovo's long, slow recovery

**Author:** The Economist

**Source:** The Economist

**Key words:** Balkans, Kosovo, economy, Serbia

**Link:** <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21734411-things-may-be-bit-better-they-look-kosovos-long-slow-recovery>

### **Summary**

Eighteen years after the end of the war in Kosovo and almost 10 years after the declaration of independence, most indicators paint a desolate picture of the country. Unemployment is around 33% and the GDP per person it's at \$3,660, is the lowest in the region. Kosovo's officials claim that the dispute with Serbia has been hampering the economy of the country by refusing its independence and threatening legal action against major foreign firms wanting to invest in it. However, some businesses are growing fast; for instance, Mr Malazogu's companies – he owns several IT companies and a fruit-juice brand called Frutomania. Gjirafa is another internet company and it's new business success has prospered by filling niches deemed too small to bother with by the world's internet giants. Education is another big headache, though. Kosovo's system is "obsolete" says Vllaznim Xhiha, another entrepreneur, who made his fortune in Switzerland. He has opened two "maker spaces" to encourage Kosovar young people to learn more about technology.

**Date:** 15 January 2018

**Title:** Japan's Abe seeking to strengthen Western Balkan ties

**Author:** US News

**Source:** US News

**Key words:** Western Balkans, Japan, Shinzo Abe, Serbia

**Link:** <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2018-01-15/japans-abe-seeking-to-strengthen-western-balkan-ties>

### **Summary**

In his visit to Belgrade, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says his country is seeking to strengthen relations with Serbia and other Balkan countries. The visit to Serbia is part of a six-country European tour that include Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Romania. On the regional level, Prime Minister Abe has described the Western Balkan countries as important for international stability, stating that Serbia is a "key country" for the stability of the region. He also focused the attention on the threat posed by North Korea, describing it as "a great danger", noting that Pyongyang's missiles have the capacity to reach Belgrade.

**Date:** 16 January 2018

**Title:** Bosnia to investigate suspected paramilitary group

**Author:** Maja Zuvela

**Source:** Reuters

**Key words:** Balkans, Bosnia, Banja Luka, Russia

**Link:** <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-security-paramilitary/bosnia-to-investigate-suspected-serb-paramilitary-group-idUSKBN1F51ZW>

### **Summary**

On January 9, in occasion of the national holiday, members of the Serbian Honour marched in full combat gear during a military parade in Banja Luka, the Bosnian Serb capital. The parade was organised in contrast with Bosnia's Constitutional Court, which has banned the holiday that could discriminate the other ethnic groups in the country. Bosnia's security agencies are investigating the Serbian right-wing group that the national government said to be a paramilitary unit willing to create problems to the opponents of the Bosnian Serb President Milorad Dodik. Serbian Honour is registered in neighboring Serbia but has an informal wing in the Bosnian Serb Republic, whose leaders say they are in the process of registering as a charity. The Security Minister Dragan Mektic too accused Serbian Honour being a paramilitary unit to "pass a pre-election message that those who oppose the current government will have a problem." The Bosnian investigative web portal, Zurnal, affirms that the group had been trained in a humanitarian center funded by Russia to act against Dodik's political opponents.

**Date:** 16 January 2018

**Title:** Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanović shot dead outside party headquarters

**Author:** Andrew MacDowall

**Source:** The Guardian

**Key words:** Balkans, Kosovo, Serbia, dialogue

**Link:** <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/16/oliver-ivanovic-serb-politician-in-kosovo-shot-dead>

### **Summary**

On January 16<sup>th</sup>, the moderate Kosovar Serb politician, Oliver Ivanović, was assassinated outside his party headquarters – in Mitrovica - on the same day Belgrade and Pristina started the talks on normalizing ties after a break of more than a year. Indeed, his murder complicated the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo because of the withdrawal of the Serbian delegation after the news of the murder. In 2016, Ivanović was convicted for war crimes, he was found guilty for crimes against civilians during the war in Kosovo in 1999. Last February the conviction was overturned and the case sent back for retrial. In the meanwhile, Ivanović had requested a more effective presence of the international community in Kosovo – Eulex and KFOR - due to the instability of the security environment in the country. "Whatever happens, it is likely that the murder will be used for political purposes," said James Ker-Lindsay, a specialist in south-eastern Europe at St Mary's University in London.

**Date:** 17 January 2018

**Title:** Macedonia: the UN tries to resolve the dispute over country's name

**Author:** Le Figaro.fr

**Source:** Le Figaro.fr

**Key words:** Balkans, United Nations, FYROM, Greece

**Link:** <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2018/01/17/01003-20180117ARTFIG00347-macedoine-l-onu-tente-de-resoudre-un-vieux-litige-sur-le-nom-du-pays.php>

### Summary

Greece and Macedonia met under the auspices of the United Nations in New York to try to resolve a dispute that has been lasting for 27 years on the name of the former Yugoslav Republic. Athens objects to the use of the name “Macedonia” - which already designates a province of northern Greece. The dispute has had several repercussions on Skopje's integration to the European Union and NATO. However, seeing a glimmer of hope in the recent declarations of the respective governments, the UN envoy, Matthew Nimetz, decided to bring the two parties together at the UN. The official name of the country, as registered at the United Nations, is Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. By accepting it as a member of the United Nations, the Security Council had stressed that it was only a temporary name. For Athens, the fact that Macedonia keeps this name suggests that Skopje has a territorial claim over the region of Greek Macedonia, where the big port cities of Thessaloniki and Kavala are located and which is considered the heart of the Macedonian kingdom of Alexander the Great.

**Date:** 20 January 2018

**Title:** Murder in Kosovo, a threat to the Balkans accession to the EU

**Author:** Vittorio da Rold

**Source:** Il Sole 24 ore

**Key words:** Balkans, Kosovo, EU, integration

**Link:** <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/mondo/2018-01-19/omicidio-kosovo-minaccia-all-avvicinamento-balcani-ue-165525.shtml?uuid=AEksQilD&fromSearch>

### Summary

The murder of Oliver Ivanović, leader of the moderate wing of the Serb minority in Kosovo, on January 16<sup>th</sup> could reopen the season of inter-ethnic feuds. The Kosovars accuse the Serb nationalists, and the Kosovar nationalists, vice versa. Serbia has frozen negotiations with the Kosovar government under way in Brussels. The Serbian president, Alexandar Vucic, has called the National Security Council. Ivanovic was murdered in the city of Mitrovica, in Kosovo, inhabited by a strong Serbian component. “It is a terrorist crime directed against the Serbian people,” sources said in Belgrade. According to the Brussels Commission, Serbia will probably be the next country to join the EU, perhaps by 2025. The EU is launching a diplomatic effort to accelerate efforts to bring six Western Balkan countries into the EU, after years of stop and go. “It is time to finish the 1989 work,” European Commissioner Johannes Hahn told Reuters, referring to the expansion to the east of the EU following the fall of the Berlin Wall.

**Date:** 27 January 2018

**Title:** Greek PM fails to get political backing for deal with Skopje

**Author:** Reuters

**Source:** The NY Times

**Key words:** Balkans, Macedonia, FYROM, Greece

**Link:** <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2018/01/27/world/europe/27reuters-greece-macedonia.html>

### Summary

Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras failed to build consensus ahead of intensified talks between Greece and Macedonia on resolving a decades-old name row. Indeed, Greece believes the name Macedonia implies a territorial claim over its own northern region that has the same name. Thus, earlier this month, hundreds of thousands of Greeks gathered in the northern city of Thessaloniki to protest against the use of the name "Macedonia" in any solution to the row. In the meanwhile, some suggestions have been made to solve the dispute, such as Northern Macedonia or Macedonia-Skopje. "We will not divide Greeks to unite Skopje," Conservative New Democracy party leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a televised address after a meeting with Tsipras. Even the influential Orthodox Church entered the quarrel, saying it was against any accord with the neighbouring country including the name Macedonia. As a member of both organisations, Greece's assent is needed for its neighbour to join NATO and the EU.

**Date:** 30 January 2018

**Title:** 17 migrants reach Montenegro over the Adriatic Sea

**Author:** Associated Press

**Source:** The Washington Times

**Key words:** Montenegro, Italy, immigration, Balkans

**Link:** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/17-migrants-reach-montenegro-over-the-adriatic-sea/2018/01/30/e75cf1a4-05cc-11e8-aa61-f3391373867e\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.47a0d910989f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/17-migrants-reach-montenegro-over-the-adriatic-sea/2018/01/30/e75cf1a4-05cc-11e8-aa61-f3391373867e_story.html?utm_term=.47a0d910989f)

### Summary

Police in Montenegro claims that an Italian fishing boat picked up 17 migrants from an inflatable boat in the Adriatic Sea. The boat carried 11 Syrians, two Moroccans, two people from Yemen, one from Afghanistan and one from Pakistan (among them four are children). The Italian crew of the fishing boat said they picked up the migrants before the boat docked the port of Zelenika in Montenegro. However, it is not clear yet where the migrants came from. Until now, Montenegro has been largely spared by the migrants outflows that affected the Balkans in 2016 and represented the peak of this phenomenon in the region.

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