

# STRATEGIC BALKANS

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**Date:** 5 March 2018

**Title:** Thousands of Macedonians rally worldwide over name dispute with Greece

**Author:** Sputnik News

**Source:** Sputnik News

**Key words:** Balkans, Macedonia, protests, Greece, EU.

**Link:** <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201803051062225067-macedonia-greece-name-dispute-protests/>

### **Summary**

World Macedonian Congress President, Todor Petrov, told Sputnik that hundreds of thousands of Macedonians took the streets in the capital Skopje and in various cities worldwide to defend their name and identity. Petrov stated that “the protests over the past days show that Macedonians are united in the defense of our name and Macedonian identity, and do not consider membership in NATO and the EU worthwhile. Macedonians now fully resist attempts by Washington to usher Macedonia into NATO at the expense of the fundamental principle of national self-determination, and demand entry in the UN family of nations under its name and without being discriminated against, as it has been for the past three decades”. The campaign “Our Name Is Macedonia” originated by the Canada based Macedonian Human Rights Movement International in 2010 and has led the charge to stop negotiations about the name Macedonia. Up to 50,000 Macedonians protested in Skopje, and more than 100,000 worldwide, demanding an end to negotiations about Macedonia’s name.

**Date:** 10 March 2018

**Title:** The decline of press freedom in Central and Eastern Europe

**Author:** Blaise Gauquelin

**Source:** Le Monde

**Key words:** Media, freedom, murder, politics, Balkans

**Link:** [http://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2018/03/10/l-inquietant-recul-de-la-liberte-de-la-presse-en-europe-centrale-et-orientale\\_5268764\\_3234.html?xtmc=balkans&xtcr=12](http://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2018/03/10/l-inquietant-recul-de-la-liberte-de-la-presse-en-europe-centrale-et-orientale_5268764_3234.html?xtmc=balkans&xtcr=12)

### **Summary**

In the night of Sunday 25 to Monday 26 February, the journalist Jan Kuciak has been found dead at home with his girlfriend in Veľká Mača, Galanta district, Slovakia. In fact, this is the first time a reporter has been killed in one of the European Union member states from the Former Communist bloc since the beginning of their integration in 2004. Jan Kuciak was investigating corruption and the links between business and political elites. Police said his death was “most likely related” to his job. This event is a shock that shakes the whole region, causing anger and worry. Indeed, it proves a sharp decline in press freedom. “The deterioration in the conditions under which journalists have to work is clear over the past ten years” said Pauline Adès-Mével, head of the Europe-Balkans office of Reporters Without Borders. “Politicians are increasingly inclined to develop a hostile speech towards the media, which has repercussions when reporters are on the ground. Then there is a concentration of press groups in the hands of a few oligarchs, who put them at the service of their [interests] ...”

**Date:** 11 March 2018

**Title:** EUCOM Commander: Moscow targeting Balkans with misinformation campaigns

**Author:** John Grady

**Source:** U.S. Naval Institution News

**Key words:** Balkans, EUCOM, Russia, NATO.

**Link:** <https://news.usni.org/2018/03/11/eucom-commander-moscow-targeting-balkans-misinformation-campaigns>

### Summary

Commander of U.S. European Command and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Army General Curtis Scaparrotti stated that the Balkans are “an area we could have problems with in the future” as Moscow increases the tempo of its disinformation campaigns in Serbia and in other nations with large Serb populations, like Kosovo and Bosnia. “Typically, when you look at their disinformation, their social media, it is generally targeted at the undermining of Western values”, especially from confidence in the governments themselves and their leaders, as attempted in Montenegro. Acknowledging a RAND Corporation study on conventional forces in Europe which found that Russian troops could capture the Baltic capitals in little more than two days, the General responded: “We have re-postured forces since the RAND study was done. We’ve rewritten plans since then and we would fight this differently than RAND found in that experiment or exercise they did”. When asked where he would invest more funds if available, General Scaparrotti answered in C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance).

**Date:** 19 March 2018

**Title:** Power vacuum in the Balkans and the dilemma of the EU

**Author:** Hans Winkler

**Source:** Die Presse

**Key words:** Balkans, EU, Austria, enlargement.

**Link:**

[https://diepresse.com/home/meinung/gastkommentar/5391735/Gastkommentar\\_Machtvakuum-am-Balkan-und-das-Dilemma-der-EU?from=suche.intern.portal](https://diepresse.com/home/meinung/gastkommentar/5391735/Gastkommentar_Machtvakuum-am-Balkan-und-das-Dilemma-der-EU?from=suche.intern.portal)

### Summary

With the end of the Ottoman Empire, “balkanization” became the term for the power vacuum in the wake of the disintegration of a large scale political order. Balkan is synonymous with ethnic conflicts, fratricidal civil wars, religiously-rooted nationalism, petty statesmanship, dependence on external powers as well as corruption and general backwardness. Only the Bulgarians have a positive relationship with their identity as a Balkan country. This is why Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl prefers to speak of the “southeast European states”. Austria is firmly committed to giving these countries a binding prospect of EU accession, especially after the collapse of Yugoslavia which has created a political and economic vacuum in this region. Nevertheless, Romania and Bulgaria are considered as deterrent examples of premature accession. The EU cannot repeat the mistake of not anticipating necessary reforms until after accession, but wants it done in advance. Finally, it can’t be forgotten that the “enlargement fatigue” in the EU has another simple reason: each new member reduces the influence of the old Member States.

**Date:** 21 March 2018

**Title:** In Montenegro, the return of Milo Djukanovic

**Author:** Elena Blum

**Source:** Libération

**Key words:** President, elections, Montenegro

**Link:** [http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2018/03/21/au-montenegro-le-retour-de-milo-djukanovic\\_1637677](http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2018/03/21/au-montenegro-le-retour-de-milo-djukanovic_1637677)

### Summary

Milo Djukanovic, who has run Montenegro for almost 30 years, withdrew in 2016. He is back in politics to take part in the April 15<sup>th</sup> presidential election. The leader has been in the crosshairs of justice since the 90s. While Montenegro was under embargo, he would have made his country a hub of contraband tobacco. This traffic, as well as financial transactions and obscure investments, would have allowed him and his family to make a fortune: according to *The Independent*, his wealth is estimated at 12 million euros. Djukanovic is said to have also had relations with the Neapolitan mafia. On April 15, he will face the businessman Mladen Bojanic supported by the Democratic Front (opposition coalition), which focuses on relations with Russia. According to the opinion polls, Djukanovic will currently receive 37% votes in the first round.

**Date:** 21 March 2018

**Title:** Tear gas in the Kosovo parliament during the approval of the border agreement with Montenegro

**Author:** El Mundo

**Source:** El Mundo

**Key words:** Balkans, Kosovo, Montenegro, borders.

**Link:** <http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2018/03/21/5ab2a4ebe2704e66678b4570.html>

### Summary

On Wednesday, the ultranationalist opposition in Kosovo launched several tear gas bombs during a session of the Parliament in Pristina to prevent the vote on the ratification of a border demarcation agreement with Montenegro which, despite the attack, has finally been approved. The delimitation agreement received the support of 80 deputies, two thirds of the plenary session needed to sanction the document. The Rugova mountain acts as the border between Kosovo and Montenegro, a country to which it will belong. The exact limit was never set in the times of the former Yugoslavia, but the inhabitants of Kosovo do not accept new borders and claim the area, which covers some 8,000 hectares of territory. Opposition to the demarcation of the border with Montenegro last year led to call early elections and a change of government. However, the ratification of the border agreement with Montenegro is an important condition demanded by the EU to liberalize the visa regime for Kosovo, in addition to launching programs that help in the fight against corruption and organized crime.

**Date:** 22 March 2018

**Title:** Israel is cultivating new friends in the Balkans, but quietly

**Author:** The Economist

**Source:** The Economist

**Key words:** Balkans, Israel

**Link:** <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21739192-string-new-partnerships-israel-cultivating-new-friends-balkans-quietly>

### Summary

Israelis are quietly discovering the western Balkans. On March 11<sup>th</sup> a couple of thousand people, including Macedonian and Israeli ministers, marched through Bitola to pay homage to the Macedonian Jews who were rounded up and sent to the death camp at Treblinka. Simultaneously, Israeli developers held a “hackaton”, and the winners of this event will visit Israel and meet people from its thriving tech sector. Israel’s interest, apart from cultivating friendly countries, is more low-key, compared to the Turkish or Russian approach. Nevertheless, Israelis have invested or committed almost €1.8 bn in Serbia since 2000, and their political consultants are often hired to advise the region’s parties during elections. In Macedonia an Israeli company now trains military helicopter pilots and this year Israel hopes to clinch a deal to sell F-16 fighter jets to Croatia. Balkan countries almost certainly receive Israeli intelligence on their jihadists returning from Syria and the number of Israelis coming to the region, mostly for long weekends in Belgrade, was up by 171% last year compared to 2017.

**Date:** 26 March 2018

**Title:** How far from Eu admission standards are western Balkans states?

**Author:** Valentina Romei

**Source:** Financial Times

**Key words:** Balkans, EU, enlargement,

**Link:** <https://www.ft.com/content/1b4dc812-2d0f-11e8-9b4b-bc4b9f08f381>

### Summary

The EU strategy of February set a target for the accession of Balkan countries in what would be the biggest EU enlargement in terms of the number of countries since 2004. The combined populations of the Western Balkans is about 18 million and the economies of these countries are not particularly large either. On average, 70 per cent of the region’s goods exports go to the EU, and investment by EU companies has created more than 240,000 jobs in the region, leading Federica Mogherini to state that “economic ties... [are] as strong as they have ever been”. Yet, none of the countries meets the entry criteria, as the main priority to the European Commission is strengthening the rule of law as all Balkan state rank at the bottom for perceptions of corruption in Europe. Last but not least, the EU commission reminds that membership requires “political and societal consensus and the support of the hearts and minds of the people”, something that has not always been the case in the past.

**Date:** 29 March 2018

**Title:** Kosovo arrests 6 Turks linked to Erdogan opponent

**Author:** Sylejman Kllokoqi

**Source:** The Washington Post

**Key words:** Balkans, Kosovo, Turkey.

**Link:** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/kosovo-arrests-5-turks-linked-to-opponent-of-erdogan/2018/03/29/23b551b2-3338-11e8-b6bd-0084a1666987\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.fb424d1c5a95](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/kosovo-arrests-5-turks-linked-to-opponent-of-erdogan/2018/03/29/23b551b2-3338-11e8-b6bd-0084a1666987_story.html?utm_term=.fb424d1c5a95)

### Summary

Police in Kosovo has arrested six Turks working with a group of schools owned by Fethullah Gulen, the cleric that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan blames for an attempted coup in 2016 and handed them over to Turkish authorities. Anadolu Agency claims that the six people were “alleged senior Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETO) members and were arrested “following operations against the terror group’s branch in the Balkans”. In Kosovo, the Interior Ministry can revoke residency permits for security, criminal, health, public moral or human rights threats, and those arrested had their residence permits revoked without providing any reasons why. However, Kosovo’s Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj convened an urgent meeting of his Cabinet and President Hashim Thaci was “disillusioned how our relevant institutions” failed to protect foreign citizens working in Kosovo, adding that he learned about it after the arrest.

**Date:** 30 March 2018

**Title:** Balkans most susceptible to ‘fake news’, study finds

**Author:** Sallyann Nicholls

**Source:** Euronews

**Key words:** Balkans, fake news, education, Open Society Institute

**Link:** <http://www.euronews.com/2018/03/30/balkans-most-susceptible-to-fake-news-study-finds>

### Summary

The Open Society Institute of Sofia has published the second annual media literacy index which ranks European countries according to their resilience to fake news. In this report 35 countries are listed according to their quality of education, media freedom and public trust. One of the main findings was that Balkan countries are among the most vulnerable to the spread of fake news, described as “rumors, hoaxes, outright lies, and disinformation from foreign governments or hostile entities”. Macedonia and Turkey ranked lowest for media literacy due to poor education, low public trust and low media freedom. According to the study, the results on the European survey on fake news show that education is the “key ingredient” to diminishing the impact of disinformation. Respondents with a higher level of education “say they come across fake news more often and they feel more confident identifying it and tend to trust more various sources (radio, television, online, etc.)”.

**Date:** 31 March 2018

**Title:** Kosovo opens investigation into extradition of Turkey nationals

**Author:** Reuters

**Source:** The New York Times

**Key words:** Balkans, Kosovo, Turkey, EU.

**Link:** <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2018/03/31/world/europe/31reuters-kosovo-security-turkey.html>

### **Summary**

Authorities in Kosovo are investigating the arrest and extradition of six Turkish citizens allegedly linked to the Gulen movement. Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj fired the interior minister and secret service chief for not informing him about the arrests, further stating: “we have decided to start an investigation of all [state] structures that were involved in arresting and deporting the six Turkish man”. Meanwhile, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said that “our National Intelligence Agency (MIT) captured six of the highest ranking members of [Gulen’s network] in the Balkans in the operation it conducted in Kosovo”, adding that he was saddened by the sacking of the two Kosovar officials. The incident could be damaging for Kosovo as it’s seeking to build closer ties with the EU. Balkans expert Florian Bieber agrees with this view, saying that “it certainly will hurt Kosovo, both for throwing doubt on the rule of law and political authority and for cooperation with a regime that is authoritarian and increasingly antagonistic with the EU”.



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