

# STRATEGIC BALKANS

**Strategic Balkans – a project by the NATO Defense College Foundation  
PRESS REVIEW MAY2018**



## OVERVIEW MAY 2018

On May 17, in the occasion of the EU-Western Balkan summit, the Heads of States and Governments of the European Union member states met in Sofia with the institutional representatives of Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. The main topic of the summit has been the enhancement of a substantial connectivity in all its dimensions among the EU and Western Balkans countries. However, within the six Western Balkans partners there are still tangible differences in relation to the criteria that should be reached to obtain full EU membership.

Indeed, peace and stability in the Western Balkans are still “very fragile”, as stated by the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Boyko Borisov, during the summit. Whilst the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is normalizing its relations with Greece and the dispute over the country’s name seems to be at the end – hence allowing Macedonia to fasten its accession to both the EU and NATO -, Bosnia and Herzegovina appear to be heading back to the dark old days of the 1990’s. Serbs and Croats are vindicating their independence and the Republika Srpska threatens to call a referendum seceding from Bosnia and Herzegovina with the support of Russia.

Turkey as well has showed its interest in Sarajevo which has been the stage of Erdogan’s political campaign, due to the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey. Bakir Izetbegovic, the Bosniak member of the tripartite presidency, claims that Turkey has been an investor and an ally of the small country.

In Albania protests are raising due to the alleged links between the Government and organised crime and illegal trafficking in the country. Serbia and Kosovo relation gained a new set-up. On the one side, the end of the EULEX in June 2018, will mark a new step towards Kosovo’s independence. Kosovo’s Justice Minister Abelard Tahiri said that the country’s “justice system has everything to act in accordance with the law.” On the other side, Aleksandar Vucic, president of Serbia, declared that he is ready to discuss the conditions for a strengthened co-operation between the two countries.

Within the EU borders, Bulgaria saw the hopes for a common currency disappear. One of the latest report of the European Central Bank raised concerns over Bulgaria’s central bank independence, inflation dynamics and urged for “wide-ranging structural reforms”.

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**Date:** 7 May 2018

**Title:** Kosovo no longer needs EU Rule of Law Mission – Justice Minister

**Author:** Sputnik News

**Source:** Sputnik News

**Key words:** Kosovo, EU, membership, rule of law, independence, President Tachi, Minister of Justice Tahiri

**Link:** <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201805071064219524-kosovo-eu-law-mission/>

### Summary

Since 2009, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), supported by all the EU member states, Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States, has been fully operating in Kosovo. The aim of the mission was to assist Kosovo's law enforcement in order to develop a strong and independent multiethnic justice system, as well as a multiethnic police and customs service. In 2016, its mandate was extended until the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2018. Last December, Hashim Tachi, President of Kosovo, called to end the EULEX in the middle of 2018. He claimed that the country main objective is to become a member state of the European Union, not having a permanent EU mission within its borders. On Monday 7<sup>th</sup> of May, Kosovo's Justice Minister Abelard Tahiri said that the country "justice system has everything to act in accordance with the law."

**Date:** 16 May 2018

**Title:** Italy alongside the EU to bring the Western Balkans to Europe

**Author:** Andrea Carli

**Source:** Il Sole 24 Ore

**Key words:** Sofia Summit, European Union, integration, Western Balkans, connectivity

**Link:** <http://www.ilssole24ore.com/art/notizie/2018-05-16/italia-fianco-ue-portare-balcani-occidentali-europa--140307.shtml?uuid=AEi1AQpE&fromSearch>

### Summary

Italy stands alongside the EU in the match for the integration of the Western Balkans in Europe. On May 17<sup>th</sup>, the Heads of State and Government of the countries that are members of the European Union will meet in Sofia the institutional representatives of Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Another step towards an integration of these countries in Europe. However, the future enlargement should not take place before 2025. In the middle, there is the risk that political instability can resume the upper hand in these countries, even on the thrust of migratory flows from Syria. It will be the first time since the Thessaloniki Summit, in June 2003, that the leaders of the 28 EU countries and those of this area are coming back to meet each other. The main theme will be connectivity within the region and between the region and the EU.

**Date:** 17 May 2018

**Title:** Macedonia says it has reached an “acceptable” agreement with Greece over the name of the country

**Author:** Ludovic Marin

**Source:** El Mundo

**Key words:** Macedonia, Greece, name dispute, EU Presidents’ Summit

**Link:** <http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2018/05/17/5afd8c02ca4741874e8b46a7.html>

### Summary

The governments of Macedonia and Greece have come to an agreement to the name dispute of the former Yugoslav Republic, which could be “acceptable” to both parties, according to the announcement made by Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev on May 17<sup>th</sup> in Sofia after a meeting with his Greek counterpart, Alexis Tsipras. According to the Macedonian premier, the solution could be reached before the forthcoming summit of the European Union leaders, to be held in Brussels at the end of June and in which the Presidents will consider the European Commission's proposal to open accession negotiations with Macedonia and Albania. The Greek government spokesman Dimitri Tzanakopoulos said this week that Greece could accept “a compound name containing the term of Macedonia”, for example “Alta-Macedonia”. On the other side, a source from the Macedonian government indicated that the “main difficulty” currently lies in the name of the country in the Macedonian language.

**Date:** 18 May 2018

**Title:** “Only a fragile peace in the Balkans”

**Author:** Die Presse

**Source:** Die Presse

**Key words:** Balkans, EU enlargement, Bulgaria, West Balkan summit

**Link:** <https://diepresse.com/home/ausland/aussenpolitik/5432147/Nur-ein-fragiler-Friede-am-Balkan?from=suche.intern.portal>

### Summary

The EU enlargement process is one of the core objectives of the Bulgarian Presidency as it has been demonstrated by the West Balkan summit in Sofia where Prime Minister Boyko Borisov has expressed confidence over the target date of 2025 for the possible entry of the currently most advanced candidate countries. Even if the two EU heavyweights Germany and France are pressing on the breaks, Borisov stated that “many good things can happen by 2025” and that he wishes for more “optimism”. For the Bulgarian Prime Minister, the mere realization of the West Balkan summit is interpreted as a success. In Sofia there were “direct and open discussions” and the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo, Aleksandar Vucic and Hashim Thaci, have joined hands. During the summit no one doubted that the place of the Western Balkans is in Europe, however Borisov stated that if Europeans continue to hesitate, other player such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Russia and China would engage in order to gain influence in the region. “The peace we have right now in the Western Balkans is very fragile”.

**Date:** 20 May 2018

**Title:** Then Sarajevo

**Author:** Spiegel Online

**Source:** Spiegel Online

**Key words:** Balkans,

**Link:** <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/recep-tayyip-erdogan-macht-wahlkampf-in-sarajevo-bosnien-herzegowina-a-1208743.html>

### **Summary**

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is currently campaigning in Sarajevo in light of the early parliamentary and presidential elections of June in Turkey. As Germany, the Netherlands and Austria had prohibited appearances by Turkish politicians, Erdogan's appearance in Sarajevo was met mostly by supporters from Germany. Supporters were met by statements such as "are you ready to give the terrorist organizations and their local and foreign henchman an Ottoman slap?". The event was met with controversy as the Croatian member of the three-member state presidency Dragan Covic mentioned that Erdogan visit has dealt strategic damage on the small Balkan country that aspires to join the EU. However, Bakir Izetbegovic, the Bosniak member of the tripartite presidency, calls himself a close friend of the Turkish president and praised Turkey as an investor and ally. Turkey has in fact signed a letter of intent to finance the highway between Sarajevo and Belgrade.

**Date:** 23 May 2018

**Title:** Albania protesters demand Prime Minister Edi Rama's resignation

**Author:** Shamil Shams

**Source:** Deutsche Welle

**Key words:** Balkans, Albania, protests, EU accession.

**Link:** <http://www.dw.com/en/albania-protesters-demand-prime-minister-edi-ramas-resignation/a-43941193>

### **Summary**

Protesters met in Tirana to march against Prime Minister Edi Rama and chanting "Rama go". Some threw stones at the premier's office building and at the Interior ministry. Democratic Party leader Lulzim Basha said that hundreds of thousands of "Albanians are protesting against the government's ties to organized crime and trafficking, which is undermining the future of Albania and now European integration efforts". The opposition also accuses Interior Minister Fatmir Xhafaj of supporting his brother who turned himself in to Italian authorities to serve a 2002 drug trafficking sentence. There's been reports of clashes between police and protesters. The national police chief, Ardi Veliu said 11 officers were wounded while trying to keep protesters away from government offices. The EU Commission has granted Albania with EU candidate status in 2014, however sweeping reforms must take place to secure entry to the bloc. Prime Minister Rama said that the commission's backing shows that Albania has "at last come out of a crossroad between the past and the future".

**Date:** 23 May 2018

**Title:** The ECB deals blow to Bulgaria's euro hopes

**Author:** Mehreen Khan and Claire Jones

**Source:** The Financial Times

**Key words:** Bulgaria, euro, European Central Bank, European Commission

**Link:** <https://www.ft.com/content/7eda46e0-5e78-11e8-ad91-e01af256df68>

### Summary

In its latest biennial “convergence report” assessing non-euro economies, the European Central Bank raised concerns over Bulgaria’s central bank independence, inflation dynamics and urged for “wide-ranging structural reforms”. Even though even Jean-Claude Juncker, EU Commission president, has supported Bulgaria’s application as Brussels is making a concerted political push to bring all the countries that are legally required to join the single currency into the eurozone after the Brexit, the ECB assessment will throw doubt on Bulgaria’s economic and institutional readiness for the euro. Until now Bulgaria has been considered the most likely 20<sup>th</sup> member to join the single currency area. The government has said it wants to join the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), a two-year waiting club required for euro adoption, by the end of the year.

**Date:** 28 May 2018

**Title:** Balkans of Europe: What will be of Sarajevo?

**Author:** Stefania Chiale

**Source:** Corriere della Sera

**Key words:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, European Union, integration, stability, external actors

**Link:** [https://www.corriere.it/sette/18\\_maggio\\_24/balceni-sarajevo-rotta-1c00cf82-5ce1-11e8-9df6-a1f7c25f6df9.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/sette/18_maggio_24/balceni-sarajevo-rotta-1c00cf82-5ce1-11e8-9df6-a1f7c25f6df9.shtml)

### Summary

The Western Balkans are knocking at the door of the European Union. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina still has a long way to go. Ethnic divisions, mismanagement, corruption, a dramatic youth unemployment: there are many obstacles to overcome. The European Union wishes and supports the stabilization of the area, of which it is the main trading partner with an annual turnover of 43 billion euros. Montenegro and Serbia have a 2025 entry perspective; Macedonia and Albania are official candidates and the negotiations will soon begin; Bosnia and Kosovo remain only as potential candidates. The European Union remains the main option for this area. “We speak of Turkish and Russian influence”, says Lars-Gunnar Wigemark, EU Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina “but we remain the main actors in terms of economic, security and stabilization.”

**Date:** 28 May 2018

**Title:** Is Bosnia heading back to the dark old days of the 1990's?

**Author:** Frida Ghitis

**Source:** The Washington Post

**Key words:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, separatism, Russia

**Link:** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/05/28/is-bosnia-heading-back-to-the-dark-old-days-of-the-1990s/?utm\\_term=.241387ad6b83](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/05/28/is-bosnia-heading-back-to-the-dark-old-days-of-the-1990s/?utm_term=.241387ad6b83)

### Summary

Nowadays Bosnia needs urgent attention from democratic countries. At the heart of the turmoil stands Milorad Dodik, the formerly moderate president of the Serb autonomous region that calls itself the Republika Srpska — a name chosen in 1992 by Radovan Karadzic, who was later convicted for leading a genocide against Bosnian Muslims. Dodik has declared that he wants to secede from Bosnia and perhaps join Serbia proper. He is also backing Croats who say they want to have their own entity. The Bosnian Muslim leader Bakir Izetbegovic has responded by saying a third entity cannot be created without war. Dodik has been defying the central government and drawing closer to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is keen to exploit Serb grievances in the region.

**Date:** 31 May 2018

**Title:** Kosovo: Serbian President is “ready to discuss everything”

**Author:** Benoît Vitkine and Sylvie Kauffmann

**Source:** Le Monde

**Key words:** Serbia, President Vucic, integration, EU Balkans Summit

**Link:** [https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2018/05/31/kosovo-le-president-serbe-est-pret-a-discuter-de-tout\\_5307442\\_3214.html?xtmc=balkans&xtcr=5](https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2018/05/31/kosovo-le-president-serbe-est-pret-a-discuter-de-tout_5307442_3214.html?xtmc=balkans&xtcr=5)

### Summary

Meeting on May 17 in Sofia for an EU-Balkans summit, European leaders confirmed the “European perspective” promised to the six countries of the former Yugoslavia. In an interview on Wednesday May 30 at *Le Monde*, in Paris, where he participated in the annual conference of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) think tank, Aleksandar Vucic, president of Serbia, said that he is determined to pursue the goal of EU membership without denying its privileged links with Moscow. “What we heard from Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel was encouraging. Of course, nobody is as enthusiastic as we would like in the Balkans. It's a reality we have to deal with, we do not work on dreams. [...] But my approach is different from that of the other [countries concerned]. I do not want to beg anything. We must do our share of the work, we must move forward for ourselves.”

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