



CAMR
CENTRUM PRE ANALÝZY
MONITORING
REPORTING

April 2024

Briefing on Western Balkans

Author: Richard Straka

The image shows the flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which consists of a blue triangle with white stars on a yellow background, set against a dark blue background.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

An important issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina in May was the UN resolution on the events in Srebrenica during the 1995 war, commonly referred to as genocide. The aim of this resolution, which is being prepared by Sarajevo and several other countries (such as Rwanda and Germany), is to establish 11 July as “The International Day of Reflection and Remembrance of the 1995 Srebrenica Genocide”. The related objectives are to establish that the denial of an act as genocide is universally condemned, and to establish one generally accepted version of the event to serve as an educational and preventive tool against further similar acts in the future. In addition, the resolution calls for the creation of school curricula that include the event in teaching, or the creation of an informative programme "Genocide in Srebrenica and the UN". This resolution was, and still is strongly opposed by representatives of the Bosnian entity Republika Srpska, and Belgrade also expressed its opposition to the resolution. Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska, called a rally in Banja Luka in mid-April to oppose the adoption of this resolution. In his speech, he again threatened the entity with secession from Sarajevo if this proposal was adopted at the UN. Serbia was not as negative and radical about the resolution as Republika Srpska. Although Belgrade is opposed, it is diplomatically seeking partners to vote against or abstain, but there are no threats from Serbian representatives as there were from the representatives of the Serbian entity in Bosnia.

Sources:

<https://www.rferl.org/a/srebrenica-genocide-un-condemned-denial-banned/32912966.html>

<https://www.euronews.com/2024/04/13/how-un-resolution-commemorating-1995s-srebrenica-massacre-is-igniting-tensions>

<https://n1info.rs/english/news/what-is-required-of-un-member-states-in-draft-resolution-on-srebrenica/>

<https://www.rferl.org/a/republika-srpska-dodik-srebrenica-genocide-denied/32911356.html>



Montenegro

For most of April, Montenegro did not take an official position on the UN resolution on Srebrenica. During the month there were several calls, mostly from the non-profit and non-governmental sector, urging the government to support the proposal. At the end of the month, information appeared in the media that Podgorica would eventually support the resolution at the UN, but would not support its implementation in the context of the requested activities and proposals.

Five years after an international arrest warrant was issued, businessman Duško Knežević has been extradited from the UK to Montenegro. The Special Prosecutor brought three charges against him - conspiracy to form a criminal organisation, money laundering and economic crime. The case is significant because the businessman is considered close to former president Milo Đukanović and his Democratic Socialist Party, which ruled Montenegro for almost 30 years. His conviction could damage the party, which is currently in opposition. His name is likely to be associated negatively with the Democratic Socialist Party in the next election campaign.

According to RFERL, Montenegro should join the countries that will help train Ukrainian soldiers. However, only three instructors are to be part of the European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM).

Sources:

<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/rezolucija-un-srebrenica-milojko-spajic/32907815.html>

<https://n1info.ba/english/news/montenegro-will-support-the-un-resolution-on-srebrenica-but-will-not-co-sponsor-it/>

<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/ko-je-dusko-knezevic/32927837.html>

<https://balkaninsight.com/2024/04/30/britain-extradites-controversial-montenegrin-businessman-wanted-for-graft/>

<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/crna-gora-obuka-ukrajina-vojnici/32902967.html>



Serbia

Serbia spent April grappling with the new government that emerged from December's parliamentary elections. A list of ministers was unveiled at the end of the month, including two individuals on the US sanctions list - Aleksandar Vulin, the former head of Serbia's intelligence service, as deputy prime minister, and Nenad Popovic, a former minister without portfolio. A vote of confidence in the proposed government is scheduled for early May. The proposed list is expected to be approved. Miloš Vučević, the current leader of the Serbian Progressive Party, which he took over after the resignation of Aleksandar Vučić, is expected to become prime minister.

In April, the Serbian Armed Forces conducted a major military exercise, "Vihor 2024", involving most of the armed forces in polygons and training areas throughout the country. The final exercise, which was one of the most complex, was observed by a number of guests - representatives of the Bosnian entity Republika Srpska, the President of the Parliament of Montenegro, KFOR Commander Major General Özkan, foreign military representatives accredited to Serbia, as well as the President of Serbia. During the training, Serbia also presented its work with GM 400 radars, of which it purchased 4 units. According to the Serbian president, who visited Paris in early April, Belgrade is preparing to buy 12 Rafale fighter jets from France. The possible purchase has been under discussion for two years, but there has now been a breakthrough in the negotiations and the purchase is expected to take place in the next few months.

Sources:

<https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-government-sns-vucevic-vulin-popovic-sanctions/32930929.html>

<https://apnews.com/article/serbia-government-us-sanctions-russia-eb7e3e620ce3f038ddddd2dbf26f5396e>

<https://www.vs.rs/en/news/EAB28227FE5A11EE9E880050568F5424/successfully-completed-joint-tactical-exercise-whirlwind-2024>

<https://www.vs.rs/en/news/61BCC8D2030E11EF9E880050568F5424/training-on-new-radars-in-126th-asewg-brigade>

<https://balkaninsight.com/2024/04/09/serbia-agrees-deal-to-buy-french-rafale-fighter-jets/>



Kosovo

In Kosovo, one of the main issues was the repeated local elections in ethnically Serb municipalities in the north of Kosovo - Leposavic, Zubin Potok, Zvecan, and North Mitrovica. However, these elections were not about electing new mayors. They were about recalling those elected in the previous elections, which were also boycotted by the Serbs. Nevertheless, the elections were not valid due to almost zero participation as a result of the Serb boycott. The situation therefore remains tense and unresolved, with no sign of compromise on either side. Only 253 people turned out to vote out of 46,000 registered voters in the two municipalities where the referendum was held. The European Union also expressed its concern about the situation and regret towards the boycott by the Serbs.

Pristina has been successful in the area of soft power, where it has been able to advance its candidate status for the Council of Europe (not to be confused with the European Council, an EU body). The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has recommended that Kosovo be invited to become a member of the organisation while proposing to monitor closely whether Kosovo can meet all the conditions for membership. However, the final decision will be taken by the vote of the ministers of the member states. Serbia does not like this move by the organisation and is threatening to leave it after Kosovo's accession. It is therefore looking for partners to block Kosovo's accession to the Council of Europe. It has several countries at its disposal that have not officially recognised Kosovo - for example Slovakia, Greece, Spain, Romania or Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Sources:

<https://www.rferl.org/a/low-voter-turnout-mayoral-recall-vote-northern-kosovo/32914381.html>
<https://balkaninsight.com/2024/04/19/north-kosovo-vote-to-dismiss-mayors-risks-failure-amid-boycott/>
<https://www.euronews.com/2024/04/17/serbia-angry-after-kosovo-gets-closer-to-joining-council-of-europe>
<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/kosovo-savet-evrope-parlamentarna-skupstina/32907079.html>

The image shows the flag of North Macedonia, which features a red field with a golden sun in the center. The sun has eight rays extending to the edges of the flag. The text 'North Macedonia' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font in the lower-left corner of the flag.

North Macedonia

The first round of the presidential elections took place in North Macedonia. Although the Albanian candidates had a good chance of making it through to the second round, in the end none of them did. Opposition candidates Gordana Siljanovska for the VMRO-DPMNE party and the current president Stevo Pendarovski for the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia made it to the second round. The second round is scheduled for 8 May. Gordana Siljanovska, who received twice as many votes as her opponent in the first round, has a better chance of winning. It is therefore unlikely that she will fail to win in the second round, despite her opponent's possible support from unsuccessful candidates. Parliamentary elections are also scheduled for the day of the second round of the presidential election. According to polls, the VMRO-DPMNE is expected to win. If this happens, the VMRO-DPMNE could win both the parliamentary and presidential elections and gain full political control over North Macedonia.

According to Erol Musliu, director of the National Intelligence Agency, China was involved in the manipulation of the run-up to the elections. However, he did not specify to what extent and through which local actors. He did, however, mention the Chinese disinformation campaign aimed at spreading anti-EU sentiment and, on the contrary, positive news about BRICS or the Silk Road initiative. The Security Service warned of possible Chinese hybrid activity, which has now come true according to its director.

Sources:

<https://balkaninsight.com/2024/04/25/opposition-candidate-wins-first-round-vote-for-north-macedonia-presidency/>
<https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/pendarovski---davkova-sdsm-vmro-izbori/32920443.html>
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0219DH18v6dSqe1kofBKGkqVUC6SapFyCg1m3k5RzxBb2sW5LepmoGLub1HXn36UF6il&id=100054380284042
<https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/kina-propaganda-razuznavanje/32916172.html>



Albania

In early April, Reporters Without Borders organised a small conference in Tirana with Albanian journalists to discuss the crackdown on press freedom in the country. Specifically, the conference focused on cases of online suppression of content through mass and coordinated reporting of content as "spam", such as Facebook's deletion of long-standing content on corruption during construction projects in the capital in previous years. Given Albania's aspirations to become a member of the European Union, it is necessary, according to the outcome of this conference, to take action against the suppression of the free press that is taking place on social media.

Protests continue in Tirana against the mayor, whose dismissal the demonstrators are demanding. The reason for his dismissal is allegedly his connection to corruption cases and abuse of power in projects in the city. The protests have led to minor violence, with Molotov cocktails thrown at the city hall and clashes between demonstrators and security forces. The fifth protest in a row took place at the end of April. The protests are expected to continue in May as they have not been successful so far.

Sources:

<https://rsf.org/en/albania-rsf-and-albanian-media-council-s-conference-show-urgency-action>

<https://www.intellinews.com/protesters-torch-tirana-city-hall-at-anticorruption-demonstration-321934/>

<https://euronews.al/en/5th-protest-of-reestablishment-in-municipality-of-tirana/>

<https://www.koha.net/en/rajon/415989/perleshje-mes-protestuesve-e-policise-ne-tirane>

<https://albaniandailynews.com/news/opposition-getting-ready-for-the-4rth-protest-in-front-of-tirana-municipality>