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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

The Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared the Election Law of Republika Srpska (RS) as unconstitutional on September 19, 2024. This law, passed by the National Assembly of RS in April 2024, aimed to transfer election organization powers from the state-level Central Election Commission (CIK) to a newly formed RS electoral body. The court deemed this transfer of authority unconstitutional, noting that only the CIK has jurisdiction over elections throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The local election campaign (elections are planned on October 6.) in Bosnia and Herzegovina officially started under stricter regulations introduced by High Representative Christian Schmidt. These rules target early campaigning, hate speech, and misinformation, with fines already passing 268,000 Bosnian marks (almost 140,000 EUR) for violations in the middle of September. The Central Election Commission has enforced the removal of non-compliant social media content. Schmidt's reforms also include banning war criminals from elections and testing modern voting technologies. One of the examples of fined candidates is Vlade Sladoje, a candidate in Kalinovik. Sladoje was fined 20,000 Bosnian marks for hate speech and glorifying convicted war criminal Ratko Mladic on social media.

Sarajevo purchased Chinese-made Hytera bodycams for local police. This step poses a potential security risk according to the critics - they worry that the use of Chinese technology could expose sensitive data to Beijing. Hytera is under scrutiny in Western countries because of its direct connection to Beijing.

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Montenegro

In the recent Podgorica local elections held on September 29, the opposition Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) emerged with the most votes. However, a local governing body was not created by the end of the month. The situation was unclear since many parties had previously stated that they would not enter into a coalition with DPS. These snap elections resulted from a political split between the ruling party and their partners. The conflict only seems set to worsen with this result.

The Montenegrin government approved a monument for the late Serbian Orthodox Church leader Amfilohije, despite objections and protests from minority Albanian and Bosniak parties. As a protest, ministers representing the minority walked out of the governmental session. The main argument is Amfilohije's past controversial statements about their communities. Originally, the Ministry of Culture had rejected the proposal but reversed its decision following pressure from the Church. Human rights groups criticized the move, highlighting Amfilohije's role in deepening social divisions and praising war criminals.

Kosovo Serbs blocked all border crossings with Montenegro on September 6, 2024, in protest of recent actions by the Kosovo authorities - the closure of five Serbian-run institutions in northern Kosovo, which Kosovo claimed were operating illegally. The blockades have prevented trucks from crossing, regardless of their license plates, and have restricted cars based on whether passengers carry Serbian documents. Protesters demanded the return of Serbian currency in northern municipalities and increased involvement of KFOR under UN Resolution 1244.

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Serbia

Protests against lithium mining in Serbia continue, with demonstrators raising concerns about the environmental impact of the proposed Rio Tinto project. The opposition party Zajedno recently organized a road blockade near Šabac, calling it a last resort to prevent lithium extraction. Meanwhile, the Serbian government coalition in parliament, led by the president of the National Assembly of Serbia Ana Brnabić, plans to discuss the issue in mid-October. Environmental activists argue the mining will harm local ecosystems, despite Rio Tinto's assurances of following international safety standards.

At the University of Novi Sad's Faculty of Philosophy, another incident occurred when masked men threw explosive devices, injuring two protesting students. The students were opposing the legitimacy of elections to the Student Parliament, accusing the ruling party-linked student organization of undemocratic practices. Despite ongoing protests and police involvement, voting continued under the supervision of private security, heightening tensions between students and the administration.

Serbia is reintroducing compulsory military service, which was abolished 14 years ago, with strong backing from President Aleksandar Vučić and his government. The decision is driven by concerns over regional security and the need to strengthen the military. Men aged 18 to 30 will serve for 75 days, including 60 days of training and 15 days of exercise, while the service will be voluntary for women. The move has sparked debate, with some supporting it for national defence and others opposing it due to financial costs and its potential impact on youth. Service will begin in September 2025.

Sources:

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Kosovo

The first hearing in the case of the September 2023 armed attack in Banjska, northern Kosovo, has been postponed. This attack, in which a group of armed Serbs killed a Kosovo police officer, resulted in the deaths of three attackers during a firefight. Milan Radoičić, former deputy leader of the Srpska Lista party, took responsibility for organizing the attack. He and other suspects are believed to be in Serbia, though Kosovo has requested their extradition. The Kosovan prosecution has charged 45 individuals with terrorism and other serious crimes, accusing them of trying to annex part of northern Kosovo. Three suspects are in custody, while the others remain at large, with international warrants issued. Serbia, meanwhile, is conducting its own investigation but denies involvement in the attack.

In early September 2024, Serbian associations organized blockades at several border crossings between Serbia and Kosovo, including Merdare, Jarinje, and Brnjak. These blockades were a protest against Kosovo's decision to shut down five parallel Serbian institutions in northern Kosovo, which the Kosovo government deemed illegal. Protesters demanded the reinstatement of these institutions, the reintroduction of Serbian currency and documents in the region, and the withdrawal of Kosovo's police forces from the north. Serbian police did not intervene, and while vehicles with Serbian documents were allowed through, those with Kosovo documentation were stopped. Kosovo authorities condemned the actions, citing concerns about masked individuals checking vehicles and contributing to an unsafe environment. Although the blockades were lifted after a day, the protesters threatened to resume their actions if their demands were not met by October.

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<https://n1info.rs/english/news/kosovo-border-crossing-blockade-only-passage-only-with-serbian-documents-can-pass/>

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

North Macedonia recently celebrated its 33rd Independence Day on September 8, marking over three decades since its 1991 referendum where more than 95% of citizens voted for independence. The event, themed "Together we fight, together we succeed," included military parades and cultural activities, reflecting the nation's progress since breaking away from Yugoslavia. The country faced significant diplomatic challenges, particularly a long-standing dispute with Greece over its name, which delayed its EU and NATO integration. During the celebration, President Gordana Siljanovska Davkova emphasized unity for national progress, while Parliamentary President Afrim Gashi highlighted the importance of NATO membership for securing peace. The day also featured awards recognizing contributions in sports, including a lifetime achievement award to Taekwondo coach Borce Kostovski.

North Macedonia's Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski expressed deep frustration over the EU's ongoing demands regarding his country's accession process. Mickoski described the conditions as "humiliating," specifically criticizing the pressure to amend the constitution, particularly regarding the inclusion of Bulgarians as a recognized ethnic group. PM further pointed out that these hurdles are eroding public trust in the EU and risking political instability within his country. Despite 20 years of efforts toward EU membership, he stressed that North Macedonia will no longer accept these conditions. The attitude of the new government in the context of the rejection of the Bulgarian demands was expected. The integration situation is thus unlikely to move to the next level in the next few years.

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Albania

Former Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha, currently embroiled in legal challenges, recently lashed out at the media for negative coverage about him. Berisha, who led Albania from 2005 to 2013 and now heads the opposition Democratic Party, threatened lawsuits against media outlets that published what he called "unpleasant" news about him, including reports linked to ongoing corruption probes. This comes at a time when Berisha is under house arrest, accused of abusing power for personal gain during his time in office, although he claims the accusations are politically motivated. Despite these legal battles, Berisha remains defiant, maintaining his public stance against current Prime Minister Edi Rama, whom he accuses of orchestrating these allegations. His media threats have drawn widespread criticism, raising concerns about press freedom in Albania, where journalists already face significant challenges.

Albania has enacted a law requiring medical students to work in the country for three years after graduation or pay back their full tuition fees. This measure is intended to address the significant emigration of doctors from Albania. Critics argue that the government should focus on improving the healthcare system rather than imposing restrictions on graduates. Thousands of doctors have left Albania in recent years, contributing to a shortage of medical professionals in the country. The new law has been met with protests from medical students, who have challenged its constitutionality in court and later to the European Court of Human Rights, which has not ruled on the case yet.

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