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Briefing on Western Balkans

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The image shows the flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which features a blue field with a yellow right-angled triangle and a diagonal line of white stars.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. At the beginning of August, a brutal murder took place in the Bosnian town of Gradacac, which was broadcast as a livestream on the social network Instagram. The man in the video executed his ex-wife and then shot two more random people in the street. He subsequently shot himself as well. The incident sparked several protests across the country.
2. A Bosnian state court has proposed a one-month detention sentence for a suspect who, according to the grounds for the motion, was alleged to have planned a terrorist attack at a mosque in cooperation with the Islamic State. This is yet another trial in which the connection between a Bosnian citizen and the Islamic State is at the heart of the case.
3. The widely criticised law on defamation was signed by the President of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik.
4. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on August 29 reiterated that the Bosnian constitution violates human rights. A tripartite representative of the Croatian ethnic minority appealed to the court: *“Bosniaks and Croats residing in Republika Srpska or Serbs residing in the Bosniak-Croat federation cannot run for office or vote in their respective place of residence. Kovacevic complained at the ECHR that Bosnia's constitution and the election law do not allow him to vote for candidates running for president of Republika Srpska, confining him to cast a vote only for the Croat and Bosniak members of the tripartite presidency.”*

Sources:

1. <https://www.rferl.org/a/bosnia-instagram-murder-suicide-live-streamed-meta/32551016.html>
2. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/08/09/bosnia-holds-alleged-isis-linked-man-for-planning-mosque-attack/>
3. <https://n1info.ba/english/news/dodik-signs-decree-making-criminalisation-of-defamation-official-in-rs-entity/>
4. <https://constitutionnet.org/news/european-court-human-rights-rules-territorial-and-ethnic-voting-restrictions-outlined>



Montenegro

1. Clingendael's recent report on Russian influence in Montenegro suggests that Russia is not building a stable and long-lasting system in the country, but is trying to exploit problems in the region's countries opportunistically. Moscow's main objectives are to slow down or worsen the process of the region's integration into Western structures. Russia is also trying to promote ethnic and inter-state issues in order to distract attention from what is happening in Ukraine or to find a way to justify its actions in other cases.
2. Montenegrin authorities have refused to extradite former FSB colonel Dmitri Senin to Russia. The military court in Podgorica, which is hearing Senin's case in absentia, issued a negative opinion. Dmitry Senin was arrested on an international arrest warrant in June 2021. However, he was granted political asylum in Montenegro, due to alleged persecution on account of his former employment. In Russia, Senin is accused of desertion.
3. The President of Montenegro appoints the leader of the political party that won the elections as Prime Minister to lead the new government. Both the President and the Prime Minister come from the same political party the Europe Now Movement (PES) and have come to power only recently for the first time.
4. European Council President Charles Michel said, that the EU should be ready to admit new members by 2030 - one of them is Montenegro.

Sources:

1. <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2023/little-substance-considerable-impact/>
2. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/chernogoriya-otkazalasj-ekstradirovatj-v-rossiyu-byvshego-polkovnika-fsb/32570192.html>
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/montenegro-president-nominates-pro-western-party-leader-pm-designate-2023-08-10/>
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/head-european-council-says-eu-must-be-ready-new-members-by-2030-2023-08-28/>



Serbia

1. Moldova denied entry to musician Goran Bregovic from Serbia (born in Bosnia) because of his political views and support for the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. Bregovic and his band were not allowed to enter Moldova after landing at Chisinau International Airport on Sunday. They supported their decision with an argument about the threat to national security.
2. Three Serbs were arrested in a joint drug raid by Europol, Spanish Guardia Civil and the Serbian, Italian and Croatian law enforcement authorities. Over 700 kilograms of cocaine smuggled from the Canary Islands to Europe were seized in an operation that had been in a preparatory and active phase for several months. The arrested persons are believed to be members of the so-called 'Balkan Cartel'.
3. The Ukrainian President met with the Serbian President, where they confirmed each other's positions on territorial integrity. Ukraine does not recognise Kosovo and Serbia does not recognise the annexation of Crimea. Kyiv and Belgrade have found an unexpected partner in each other on this issue, given Serbian-Russian relations.
4. On 24 August, a march of Ukrainian refugees or citizens living in Serbia took place in the streets of Belgrade, along with Serbian activists and diplomats. This march commemorated the independence of Ukraine.

Sources:

1. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/08/21/moldova-bans-serbian-musician-goran-bregovic-citing-security-concerns/>
2. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/08/22/balkan-cartel-members-busted-as-700kg-of-cocaine-seized-in-spain/>
3. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-serbia-zelenskiy-vucic-russia-war/32558581.html>
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrainians-serbia-mark-independence-day-belgrade-kyiv-seek-improve-ties-2023-08-24/>



Kosovo

1. France has threatened to cancel visa-free travel between the EU and Serbia and Kosovo if there is no reconciliation or adjustment of the situation regarding the normalisation of relations. The President of Kosovo has spoken out strongly against this claim. In her view, this would be an effective way of permanently burying any hope of stability in the Western Balkans region. Recent developments in relations between Kosovo and the West have been negative. Such a decision would lead to an even greater rift between the partners, which could endanger Kosovo at the international level.
2. According to a report by Amnesty International, Kosovo is unable to protect its citizens from domestic violence. Women and citizens of ethnic or sexual minorities face the most violence. This is similar to the situation in other countries. According to the organisation, Kosovo is not taking sufficient steps to change the situation, despite some progress.
3. Rita Ora, a British singer of Kosovan descent who is also an honorary representative of Kosovo, became the target of an online hate campaign after a fan handed her a Serbian flag at a concert in Hungary and she said she unknowingly waved it. She was attacked mainly by Kosovars and Croats.
4. The Dokufest film festival is held in Prizren, southern Kosovo. There are more than 200 documentaries and films in this year's edition of Dokufest, including entries from Colombia, Tanzania, Britain, Canada and the United States. The main theme was artificial intelligence.

Sources:

1. <https://apnews.com/article/kosovo-france-eu-visas-serbia-dad67ae6eedc25c88a84e350c5246f86>
2. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur73/7123/2023/en/>
3. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/08/28/rita-oras-serbian-flag-incident-generates-hate-storm-on-social-media/>
4. <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/film-festival-brings-world-kosovo-2023-08-11/>



North Macedonia

- 1.** The Serbian president meets the president of northern Macedonia at the Venerable Prohor Pčinjski Monastery in southern Serbia. Both agreed to deepen their cooperation and relations.
- 2.** The Parliament of Northern Macedonia holds a 10-day debate on a proposal to amend the Constitution in order to meet Bulgarian demands and open the way to the European Union, which Bulgaria is blocking. There is strong opposition to this move to amend the constitution. The situation with the adoption of the constitutional amendment is likely to be very controversial.
- 3.** The United States, like most Western partners, hopes for a shift on this issue towards the country's eventual EU membership. This belief was expressed by a visiting US official at the end of August.

Sources:

1. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/serbia-north-macedonia-vows-to-strengthen-their-existing-good-bilateral-ties/2960095>
2. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/08/18/north-macedonia-parliament-starts-session-on-constitutional-change/>
3. <https://apnews.com/article/north-macedonia-eu-accession-bulgaria-balkans-skopje-41a50fd122d5dca7a0cad1719ce52cdf>



Albania

1. Albania is experiencing one of the record tourist seasons during the summer. Tourists, mostly from Italy, have found Albania a cheaper way to spend their summer holidays than at home. They make up a significant majority of all tourists in the country. In addition to them, many Spaniards, Britons and even Americans headed to Albania.
2. Greece is concerned about the continued detention of the mayoral candidate in the municipality of Himare, an ethnic Greek who is accused of electoral corruption. According to Athens, this worsens Albania's EU membership prospects.
3. According to the media, the Special Prosecution Against Corruption and Organized Crime SPAK announced the arrest of the former deputy health minister. Action is related to the concession about the sterilization of surgical equipment, signed in 2015.

Sources:

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2023/aug/18/why-italians-are-shunning-the-southern-coast-and-heading-to-albania>
2. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/greece-says-continued-detention-of-ethnic-greek-politician-to-harm-albania-s-eu-bid/2963654>
3. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/08/17/albania-arrests-former-deputy-minister-over-dubious-surgical-equipment-concession/>