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Briefing on Western Balkans

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Bosnia and Herzegovina

- 1.** At the beginning of the month, the police arrested five former Bosnian Serbs Army officers and soldiers suspected of participating in war crimes during the war in 1995. They were arrested in Zvornik, Sekovici, Han Pijesak, Vlasenica and Bileca.
- 2.** The dispute between Sarajevo and Banja Luka intensified because the Bosnian court confirmed an indictment against secessionist Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik. The threat of criminal trial for the leader of Republika Srpska sparked smaller protests across the country at the beginning of the month.
- 3.** The Bosnian state court in Sarajevo sentenced former Bosnian soldier Almir Sarajlic to 20 years in prison. He is guilty of killing 12 Croatian Defence Council prisoners of war in 1993.
- 4.** The National Assembly of the Republika Srpska adopted a controversial draft law (Law on the Special Register and Publication of the Activities of Non-Profit Organisations), according to which foreign-funded non-profit organisations operating in the Serbian entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina must register and report on their activities. The law has not yet been put into full force and has not gone through the whole adoption process. The main criticism is that it copies the Russian law, which suppresses civil society and democratic principles.

Sources:

1. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/12/bosnia-arrests-five-serb-ex-soldiers-for-srebrenica-genocide/>
2. <https://www.rferl.org/a/bosnia-indictment-dodik-republika-srpska/32588014.html>
3. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/20/bosnian-army-ex-soldier-convicted-of-killing-croat-prisoners-of-war/>
4. <https://www.rferl.org/a/draft-law-foreign-agents-bosnia-republika-srpska/32614638.html>



Montenegro

1. In Montenegro a competition for the laziest citizen was held, where the participants lie on the bed without moving. The competition started on August 21 and the winner will receive 1000 euros. This event went viral on social media even abroad.
2. An underground tunnel was discovered in Podgorica between the Highest Court and a nearby apartment complex. The tunnel was very well camouflaged and its construction must have taken a long time according to the High Court's president, Boris Savic.
3. Montenegro has said it wants to declare an international request for the arrest of four Serbian citizens and two others from an unspecified country for building a tunnel under the Highest Court. However, according to Montenegrin authorities, they still did not have enough evidence in September.
4. Attorney Nikola Angelovski filed a criminal complaint with the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office in early September against the director of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption, Jelena Perović. According to him, this move, in violation of the law, gave the Novi Sad company "Prozone" access to the data of all Montenegrin officials, starting with the government and the Assembly.

Sources:

1. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/18/montenegros-laziest-citizen-contest-sets-new-slothfulness-record/>
2. <https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-tunnel-found-courthouse/32589828.html>
3. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/22/montenegro-charges-serbian-citizens-with-tunnelling-into-court-storage/>
4. <https://en.vijesti.me/news/black-chronicle/673555/vdt-in-the-filed-complaint-against-Perovic%2C-the-data-of-public-officials-was-given-to-a-foreign-company>



Serbia

1. In the middle of the month, negotiations took place between Serbia, Kosovo and the EU. However, the result was negative and the parties parted ways. Kosovo rejected the implementation plan of the association of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo. This meeting is a harbinger of a longer period when mutual relations will probably not improve.
2. Serbian security forces have increased their presence on the Serbian-Hungarian border in response to a shootout between two gangs and an increased number of migrants in the area. The result of the shootout between the smuggler gangs in Subitoca is one dead and two wounded.
3. According to US officials, Serbia has withdrawn more troops and equipment to the border with Kosovo. The White House has spent much of the time urging Belgrade to pull those troops back inland. In late September, according to U.S. officials, Serbian troops were still near the Kosovo border in greater numbers, but the situation was no longer deteriorating.
4. According to the BIRN and other regional media: *Controversial businessman Milan Radoicic said he planned the operation by armed Serbs that left a Kosovo policeman dead on Sunday himself, without Belgrade's backing, and resigned as deputy head of Kosovo Serb political party Srpska Lista.*

Sources:

1. <https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-kosovo-leaders-brussels-talks/32592776.html>
2. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/12/serbian-police-operation-targets-people-smugglers-after-armed-clashes/>
3. <https://www.rferl.org/a/vucic-kosovo-serbia-monastery-attack/32615778.html>
4. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/29/kosovo-serb-kingpin-radoicic-takes-responsibility-for-weekend-shootout/>



Kosovo

1. Banjska attack: On 23 and 24 September, a group of several dozen Serbs carried out a military action in the village of Banjska in northern Kosovo. The action raises many questions. Pristina and Brussels have classified this act as a terrorist attack. During the brief clashes, one Kosovo police officer and three attackers were killed. The attackers, with a large combat arsenal, retreated after the first clash to a Serbian Orthodox monastery in Banjska, where they took local clerics and tourists hostage. According to the available information, they did not threaten their lives but merely locked them in the building in view of the situation. In the end, none of these people were harmed. On 24 September, the group of attackers withdrew to Serbian territory and the situation calmed down. To this day, it is not known what the real target of this attack was. The attackers had enough weapons to put up temporary resistance, but not long-term resistance. Nor was it likely that the conflict would have grown larger, as only a few dozen men were involved. The real target is likely to become apparent only in time with the events following this attack. In the meantime, several NATO countries have reinforced their missions in Kosovo in response to this attack. Officially, the Serbian businessman Milan Radoicic was behind the attack, which was to have been planned without Belgrade's support. In response to the incident and the admission of guilt, Radoicic resigned as deputy head of the Kosovo Serb political party Srpska Lista.

Sources:

1. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-nato-more-kfor-troops-tensions-serbs/32616108.html>
2. <https://www.rferl.org/a/who-was-behind-deadly-attack-kosovo-monastery/32610373.html>
3. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/29/kosovo-serb-kingpin-radoicic-takes-responsibility-for-weekend-shootout/>
4. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/28/belgrade-to-question-kosovo-serb-kingpin-radoicic-over-violence-vucic/>

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

1. At the end of September, Bulgaria expelled three representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church. This was allegedly due to their involvement in hybrid operations in favour of Moscow. Among those expelled were the Russian abbot of the church, Archimandrite Vasyan, and a pair of Belarusian clergymen from the Church of St Nicholas of Mirliki in Sofia. Archimandrite Vasyan is a Russian citizen with the full name of Nikolai Zmeyev. All three have been banned from entering Bulgaria for five years. Archimandrite Vasyan is also banned from entering Northern Macedonia, where the Russian Orthodox Church is present and active. Skopje claims that Archimandrite Vasyan was supposed to be part of Russian intelligence. He was supposed to direct the activities and diplomacy of the Church in the country for the benefit of the Russian secret services.
2. Macedonia has no plans to stop providing military assistance and support to Ukraine. The small Balkan country has provided Ukraine with most of the heavy Soviet-type combat equipment used by the Ukrainians in the fighting, or spare parts for machines in better condition. Skopje was able to afford this thanks to protection through NATO membership.
3. In early September, a march was held in Skopje in response to accusations that state hospital employees were selling medicines on the black market instead of helping cancer patients. This was to lead to the death of many citizens of Northern Macedonia. However, this protest did not produce any results.

Sources:

1. <https://www.rferl.org/a/north-macedonia-expels-russian-diplomats/32595644.html>
2. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/north-macedonia-says-it-will-continue-supporting-ukraine/3002565>
3. <https://apnews.com/article/north-macedonia-protest-health-scandal-cancer-drugs-8e7f7aecfdc5451fa8fe6c424de1a256>



Albania

1. The European Council adopted a decision on the signing of an agreement with Albania on the operational activities of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). It should allow the organisation of joint operations and the deployment of Frontex border management teams in Albania under the consent of Tirana.
2. At a joint meeting of Spencer Boyer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for European and NATO Policy, and Gelardina Prodani, the Secretary General of the Albanian Ministry of Defense, Albania and the US sign several documents that deepen military cooperation between Washington and Tirana.
3. Lefter Koka, a former environment minister, was sentenced to six years in prison earlier this month. The reason for the detention is corruption in the construction of the factory, which never took place.

Sources:

1. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/09/08/council-will-sign-agreement-with-albania-on-frontex-cooperation/>
2. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3537581/us-and-albania-strengthen-defense-ties-with-key-bilateral-consultation-in-tirana/>
3. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/25/albania-former-minister-sentenced-for-corruption/>