



**CAMR**  
CENTRUM PRE ANALÝZY  
MONITORING  
REPORTING

**October, 2023**

# **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

1. On 22 October, a rally in support of Palestine was held in Sarajevo in front of the local municipality building, attended by several thousand people. The event was also attended by the mayor of the city Benjamina Karic. During her speech, she compared the situation in Gaza to the siege of Sarajevo between 1992 - 1995. From the crowd came shouts such as "genocide", and "yesterday Srebrenica, today Gaza". There were also banners reading "Free Palestine" or "Stop the War"
2. In view of the situation in the Middle East, Bosnia has increased its security measures. The move was backed by Nenad Nešić, Bosnia and Herzegovina's security minister, who said that Bosnia was following countries such as France and Belgium.
3. Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik is facing charges related to his efforts to ignore decisions by an international envoy appointed as a result of the Dayton peace agreement. On 16 October, he attended a preliminary hearing at the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He described the hearings as illegitimate because they were conducted in Latin script and not Serbian Cyrillic. He also complained of a sore back and an inability to stand. In the end, he called the whole hearing a circus.
4. According to the Bosnian Foreign Ministry, 23 people with Bosnian documents have requested evacuation from Gaza. However, due to the security situation and the blockade of the Gaza border, it was not possible to get them out of the area in October.

### Sources:

1. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-join-pro-palestinian-protest-bosnia-2023-10-22/>
2. <https://sarajevotimes.com/bih-security-minister-security-measures-in-bih-raised-to-a-higher-level/>
3. <https://www.rferl.org/a/bosnia-serb-dodik-court-hearing-/32639850.html>
4. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/10/19/hundreds-of-balkan-states-nationals-remain-stranded-in-gaza/>



# Montenegro

1. Several thousand people attended a rally in support of Palestine in the capital Podgorica on 22. October. According to the media, it was organised mainly by young students and members of the Montenegrin-Palestinian society. During the speeches, calls were made for the government to respond to the "genocide of the Palestinians" and to adopt sanctions against Israel. The Minister of Labor and Social Welfare, Admir Adrović, attended this event. The demonstration took place in front of the building of the UN Representative for Montenegro.

2. Montenegro formed a new governing coalition in October. An agreement was reached at the end of October and a governing coalition was formed. The government will have 18 ministries and five deputy prime ministers. Even though Montenegro is a member of NATO and this government profiles itself as pro-European with the goal of continued integration into the EU, this government is perceived in the media and abroad as pro-Russian and problematic. Given the breadth of the coalition, it is impossible to predict with certainty what direction the government in Podgorica will take.

A protest was held in Podgorica to express dissatisfaction with the possibility of appointing Andrija Mandić from the *For the Future of Montenegro bloc* as Speaker of Parliament because of his pro-Serb and anti-Western views. However, Mandić was eventually appointed to his position.

## Sources:

1. <https://en.vijesti.me/news/politics/678714/rally-of-support-for-Palestine-in-Podgorica%2C-the-government-and-the-president-to-condemn-the-genocide>
2. <https://en.vijesti.me/news/politics/678892/scekic-candidate-for-vice-president-of-the-government-for-regional-development-and-minister-of-sports-and-youth-Jokovic%2C-minister-of-agriculture>
3. <https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-mandic-pro-putin-speaker/32661765.html>
4. <https://x.com/BalkanInsight/status/1719047406463947187?s=20>



## Serbia

1. On 22 October 2023, a pro-Palestinian rally was also held in Belgrade. Several thousand people took part. A demonstration was held on Republic Square. It was accompanied by slogans such as "Free Palestine", "End the genocide in Palestine" or "Freedom for Palestine.". There was also a smaller pro-Israel rally on October 15.
2. Serbia's Bureau for Social Research, BIRODI, a monitoring NGO says that according to their latest research Serbian president Aleksandar Vucic *"has been getting 39 per cent of the airtime on nationally-broadcast TV news programmes including those aired by N1, a cable station known for its critical reporting about Vucic and his ruling party."* The research covers the period from September 1, 2023, to October 15, 2023. Opposition to the current government has only a 5% share of news coverage.
3. In the middle of the month, a new free trade agreement was signed between Belgrade and Beijing. It was signed by Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, who attended the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing. This agreement is expected to enter into force in the spring of 2024. According to the Serbian President, this agreement will help Serbian honey and wine production. However, further details are not yet known to the public.
4. Envoys from the European Union and the United States have called on Serbia and Kosovo to resume dialogue, which has been interrupted in recent weeks following a series of events and actions by both sides.
5. Serbia's deputy prime minister told Chinese television that their military-to-military trade relations have greatly enhanced Serbia's security and the capabilities of its military. Serbia purchased CH-95 and CH-92A UAVs and the FK-3 surface-to-air defence system, similar to the Russian S-300/400 systems.

### Sources:

1. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/thousands-stage-rallies-in-west-balkans-in-support-of-palestine/3029754>
2. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/10/24/coverage-of-serbian-president-dominates-tv-news-shows-research>
3. <https://www.politico.eu/article/serbia-and-china-sign-free-trade-deal/>
4. <https://apnews.com/article/kosovo-serbia-eu-us-tension-diplomacy-08208fd52f4f6a51012259c82c2df4e0>
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/serbia-highlights-importance-chinese-defence-equipment-2023-10-23/>
6. <https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-israel-victims-solidarity/32638408.html>



# Kosovo

1. Envoys from the European Union and the United States have called on Serbia and Kosovo to resume dialogue, which has been interrupted in recent weeks following a series of events and actions by both sides. The EU was represented by Miroslav Lajčák and the USA by Gabriel Escobar, Special Representative for the Western Balkans. They met Prime Minister Albin Kurti in Pristina and later in Belgrade with President Aleksandar Vucic. They were accompanied by diplomats from Germany, France and Italy.
2. Kosovo evacuated only a few of its citizens from Israel in response to current events in the area. Further information on the country's citizens in Gaza is not known.
3. Kosovo's president Vjosa Osmani has refused to appoint Blerim Isufaj as the country's chief prosecutor. The Country's Prosecutorial Council accused her of political interference in the judicial system of the country. The President defended his decision by saying that his selection for the position was accompanied by problematic events and actions.
4. Several countries have announced the deployment of additional troops for the KFOR mission. Romania has sent an additional 130 troops, the UK 200, and Germany is also planning to send 150 more in 2024. This is in response to the September attack in the village of Banjske, in which three Serb attackers and one Kosovo police officer were killed.
5. A rally in support of Palestine was also held in Pristina. It was organised by Albert Berisha, a former member of the terrorist organisation who served his sentence and subsequently started to rehabilitate radicals.

## Sources:

1. <https://apnews.com/article/kosovo-serbia-eu-us-tension-diplomacy-08208fd52f4f6a51012259c82c2df4e0>
2. <https://prishtinainsight.com/crisis-in-israel-kosovo-evacuates-citizens-amid-escalating-conflict/>
3. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/10/17/kosovo-president-refuses-to-appoint-top-prosecutor/>
4. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-kfor-romanian-reinforcements-nato/32637314.html>
5. <https://www.koha.net/en/arboretum/396335/in-Prishtina-marched-for-Palestine/>

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.** North Macedonia registers a married couple stranded in Gaza who cannot be evacuated. However, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the couple is fine and should be on the priority evacuee list through the Red Cross/Crescent.
- 2.** In a survey conducted by the Centre for Policy Research and Communication (CRPC), 45.35% of respondents answered that the country is moving in the wrong direction, while only 13.7% of respondents think that North Macedonia is moving in the right direction. From the rest, 19.95% of the respondents refused to answer and 21.05% answered “don't know”. The negative view is stronger among the Albanian ethnic group. Around 47, % of the respondents answered that they do not trust state institutions, 23% refused to answer, 21% answered “don't know” and only 9%, said that they trust the state institutions.
- 3.** North Macedonia can receive part of the EU's 6 billion package, but it needs to meet a number of conditions. Brussels requires it to reform the business environment, create an efficient public administration, and sound public finances and improve the fight against corruption. Finally, there are the conditions of a problematic constitutional change to recognise Bulgarians as a minority. Without this, it is impossible for Skopje to advance in European integration, because Bulgaria will block it. The progress of the reforms will be supported financially by the package according to Von der Leyen.

### Sources:

1. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/10/19/hundreds-of-balkan-states-nationals-remain-stranded-in-gaza/>
2. <https://netpress.com.mk/anketa-na-crpc-gra-anite-nemaat-doverba-vo-drzhavnite-institucii-a-45-35-smetaat-deka-drzhavata-se-dvizhi-vo-pogreshna-nasoka/>
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-help-western-balkans-reforms-with-6-bl-euro-package-von-der-leyen-2023-10-30/>



## Albania

- 1.** Albania registers several of its citizens stuck in Gaza. As with other countries, however, it does not have the ability to help them and evacuate them. According to information for BIRN, it is supposed to be at least a family with children. They are waiting for information about a possible evacuation through Egypt, which still has not opened the border crossing with Gaza.
- 2.** Former Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha is facing corruption charges. He is charged with corruption and money laundering in connection with a land deal involving a Tirana property. His son-in-law was also denied to leave the country because he was also supposed to be involved in these charges. They stand by their innocence. Berisha and his family have been on the US sanctions list since 2021, where they cannot enter the US territory. The US says it is because of corruption cases during his rule.
- 3.** Albania has been removed from the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) "grey list" of countries with inadequate anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing. This represents a significant step forward in "soft power" for the country, but problems remain.

### Sources:

1. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/10/19/hundreds-of-balkan-states-nationals-remain-stranded-in-gaza/>
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3. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/albania-taken-off-fatf-grey-list-but-money-laundering-concerns-persist/>