



## Situation room

### **\*\* CURRENT EVENTS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS \*\***

**Period under review:** from 15 November 2022 to 30 November 2022.

[This report is based on publicly available sources to describe the situation, which may change rapidly.]

### **Tensions between Belgrade and Prishtina:**

- **(17 November)** Nine members of the Serbian List and one representative of the Civil Initiative took an oath of office in the Assembly of Kosovo even though their arrival was not announced. After taking the oath, the Serbian representatives announced a boycott of the institutions and left the hall just before Prime Minister Albin Kurti entered.
- **(17 November)** After Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani announced elections on December 18 in four municipalities in which Serbian representatives resigned, all Serbian parties announced a boycott of local elections in the north of Kosovo.
- **(19 November)** Serbs who withdrew from Kosovo's institutions are signing employment contracts with the Serbian government, reports *Al Jazeera Balkans*.
- **(21 November)** No agreement was reached at negotiations in Brussels on 21 November between Kosovo and Serbia regarding the row over license plates. After the meeting, the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Josep Borell, said that the Prime Minister of Kosovo was not willing to accept the agreement.
- **(22 November)** Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti postponed the implementation of the second phase of the decision on Serbian license plates for 48 hours following the intervention of the United States. This phase of the Kosovo government's plan envisaged the imposition of fines on holders of Serbian license plates.
- **(23 November)** Kosovo and Serbia reached an agreement on car license plates in northern Kosovo, paving the way for leaders to negotiate a comprehensive agreement to resolve Kosovo's status under a Franco-German proposal.
- **(25 November)** Following Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti's criticism of the EU's chief diplomat Josep Borrell regarding the dialogue with Serbia, President Vjosa Osmani accused him of favoring Belgrade and thanked only the United States for helping broker an agreement on license plates.

### **Montenegro:**

- **(16 November)** **Caretaker** Prime Minister Dritan Abazović explained the dismissal of Savo Kentera, director of the National Security Agency. A few months before his dismissal, the agency led two complex operations related to cigarette smuggling and the expulsion of Russian diplomats and foreign nationals suspected of being Russian spies. Premier Abazović said that he dismissed him due to his illogical actions during the aforementioned operations. Journalists and the opposition estimate that he did not give clear and concrete answers.

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- **(17 November)** More than ten thousand citizens, supporters of the opposition, protested in front of the Montenegrin Assembly with the demand for extraordinary parliamentary elections. The caretaker government and the parliamentary majority are accused of destroying the constitutional order of the country and acting in the interests of Russia and Serbia. The protest passed without incident.
- **(18 November)** In the Montenegrin parliament, a new attempt to reach an agreement between the parliamentary parties on the election of judges of the Constitutional Court had failed. The European Union expressed concerns over the institutional crisis in the country.
- **(28 November)** A protest rally took place in front of the Montenegrin Assembly in Podgorica again, for the third time this month. The opposition, led by the president of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), Milo Đukanović, is demanding early parliamentary elections and opposes the current caretaker government, which the opposition says is pro-Serbian and pro-Russian.
- **(29 November)** On November 29, after six adjournments, the renewed trial for the attempted "coup d'état" on the day of the parliamentary elections in Montenegro in 2016 began at the High Court in Podgorica. It should be remembered that the parliamentary elections on October 16, 2016 marked the attempted "coup d'état". At that time, the police arrested a group of 20 Serbian citizens, among whom was retired police general and former commander of the Serbian police, Bratislav Dikić. Shortly after that, it became known that the Russian services were also behind the attempted "coup", as the list of suspects included Russian citizens Eduard Shishmakov and Vladimir Popov, who could not be reached by the law enforcement authorities.

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina:**

- **(16 November)** The new members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) were inaugurated and assumed their four-year mandate. However, Milorad Dodik, a former member of the BiH presidency and the new president of the Republika Srpska entity, left the hall during the speech of the Croatian member of the Presidency, Željko Komšić. He explained on Twitter that he left the hall because of Komšić's lies during his speech. In doing so, he accused him of being elected for the fourth time by Bosniaks instead of Croats, as he should have been, according to the constitution.
- **(24 November)** The representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the United Nations abstained from voting on a resolution condemning human rights violations in Iran, which provoked reactions and many questions in the country.
- **(28 November)** During his visit to Sarajevo, Oliver Varhelyi, the EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, expressed the hope that Bosnia and Herzegovina would be granted candidate status in December.
- **(30 November)** The largest Croatian party in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), has signed an agreement with eight Bosniak parties that have so far been in opposition at the state level. With

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this agreement, Bakir Izetbegović's SDA party will probably no longer be part of the ruling coalition after more than 20 years.

### **Serbia:**

- **(15 November)** The Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Serbia called on all citizens of Serbia between the ages of 19 and 30 to voluntarily serve a six-month military service in the Serbian army.
- **(16 November)** In Serbia, the multimedia online portal of the Russian state television RT started operating in the Serbian language. The event triggered reactions from the European Parliament's rapporteur for Serbia, Vladimir Bilčík, who says that the country, which is a serious candidate for joining the European Union, should not be a center of disinformation for the Kremlin.
- **(16 November)** The media platform *Radio Slobodna Evropa* stated that Belgrade "took three steps" towards Moscow in just two days. The first one was the meeting between Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Turk Daudov, adviser to Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, which took place on 15 November. The second step was the opening of the portal of the Russian state television RT, on 15 November, in Belgrade. The third occurred on 14 November, when Serbia decided to abstain from voting in the United Nations General Assembly, even though it supported resolutions condemning Russian aggression in the UN four times before.
- **(17 November)** Representatives of the Albanians from the south of Serbia once again demanded the same status in the country as the Serbs in the north of Kosovo.
- **(28 November)** The FIFA Disciplinary Commission launched proceedings against the Football Association of Serbia over the flag that was displayed in its dressing room during the Brazil vs Serbia match. On the flag, Kosovo was shown as part of Serbia. The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Serbia said that there is nothing wrong with the flag and described FIFA as hypocritical.

### **Croatia:**

- **(18 November)** Croatia commemorated the 31st anniversary of the collapse of the Croatian defenses of Vukovar and the war crime against the Croats in Škabrnja, a village in the hinterland of Zadar, which also took place on 18 November 1991. After the collapse of the Vukovar defenses, several thousand people were taken to camps in Serbia, while least 264 wounded soldiers and civilians from the Vukovar hospital were liquidated in Ovčari, a farm near Vukovar. The Croatian Prime Minister announced from Vukovar that "reconciliation has no alternative".
- **(23 November)** A few days after the Austrian interior minister expressed his opposition to the extension of the Schengen area and expressed the possibility that Vienna will block Croatia's entry from the first day of next year, Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer said in Zagreb that Austria would support Croatia's membership in the Schengen area.

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- **(25 November)** Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksi Reznikov thanked the Croatian government for its willingness to help Ukraine in the training of Ukrainian soldiers. The training of Ukrainian soldiers in Croatia has been a topic of discussion for days. Defense Minister Banožić sent the President of the Republic of Croatia, Zoran Milanović, a proposal for a decision on Croatia's participation in the European Union mission, which includes, among other things, the training of some Ukrainian soldiers, which Milanović constantly opposes in his media appearances.
- **(28 November)** Slovenian President Borut Pahor started a two-day visit to Croatia on November 28. This was Pahor's last visit abroad. He met with the entire state leadership. Pahor emphasized that we must have good, friendly and honest relations with our neighbors.

### **North Macedonia:**

- **(24 November)** The Bulgarian cultural club "Tsar Boris the Third", located in Ohrid, was once again the target of an attack. The Ohrid police found that unknown perpetrators shot at the club's windows and doors, and the incident was reported to the prosecutor's office. The club "Tsar Boris the Third" was opened on 7 October, and has been attacked three times. The first attack took place after the opening of the club in early October, and it was stoned on 21 November.

### **Albania:**

- **(28 November)** Albania and Kosovo held a joint parliamentary session in Tirana on Sunday 27 November to mark the 110th anniversary of Albania's independence, with the prime ministers of both governments addressing current geopolitical tensions and issues facing Albanians at home and abroad.

### **Other:**

- At a two-day conference on November 16, 2022, the Balkan Research Network (BIRN) presented the results of a survey in the form of an interactive map showing more than 70 far-right and other extremist groups in six countries of the Western Balkans.

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