



Situation room

**** CURRENT EVENTS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS ****

Period under review: from 1 December 2022 to 15 December 2022.

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

Belgrade and Pristina relations:

- **(1 December)** Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti appointed the leader of the Progressive Democratic Party of Serbs, Nenad Rašić, as Minister for communities and returns, undermining the Serbian boycott of Kosovo institutions. In response, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić announced that he would not travel to Tirana for the European Union's Western Balkans Summit 6 December. He said that Brussels did not adequately condemn Pristina's action and accused the EU of having an "anti-Serbian attitude". During the performance for Pink TV, he uttered a series of harsh insults towards Kurti and Rašić.
- **(2 December)** The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, spoke in Belgrade with the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Oliver Varhelyi and presented his views of the problems in Kosovo. Vučić said that Varhelyi pointed out the need to harmonise Serbia's policy with the foreign policy of the EU.
- **(5 December)** The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, has confirmed that he would still travel to Tirana for the EU-Western Balkans summit, because otherwise Serbia would face "huge damage".
- **(6 December)** The EU Special representative for the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, Miroslav Lajčak, presented a new version of the draft agreement between Belgrade and Pristina to Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti.
- **(6 December)** Several incidents occurred in the Serbian-majority municipalities of Zubin Potok and North Mitrovica in the north of the country. The police accompanied the Central Electoral Commission of Kosovo to provide assistance in preparations for holding local elections in municipalities in the north of the country. The police claimed that masked individuals and groups damaged the offices of the municipal election commissions in northern Kosovo using "dangerous means, including hand grenades of Yugoslav production". The police announced that there were no injuries, but "the offices of the municipal election commission were destroyed." Kosovo's Interior Minister Džellalj Svečlja stated that organised masked groups attacked municipal election commission officials and the police.
- **(6 December)** Petar Petković, Director of the Office for Kosovo in the Government of the Republic of Serbia, posted several photos on Twitter showing offices of the municipal election commission in northern Mitrovica, which he labelled as "destroyed by special forces of Kosovo". The Kosovo police denied Petković's statements. Prime Minister Kurti and the President of Kosovo say that organised groups are being coordinated and paid by Serbia with the aim of destabilising Kosovo.
- **(7 December)** The American ambassador in Pristina, Jeffrey Hovenier, stated that the United States is concerned because there are currently no conditions for holding extraordinary local elections in the north of Kosovo.
- **(8 December)** The Kosovo police stated that in the village of Srbovac in the municipality of Zvečan, members of the Kosovo police were attacked by armed persons during the night. The incident happened around 11 p.m., at a time when

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police units were patrolling in Srbovec. A police statement described individuals armed with long barrelled guns that attacked from an Audi vehicle with Serbian license plates - Kosovska Mitrovica.

- **(9 December)** Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić repeated the statement that Serbia has the right to send up to 1,000 military personnel to Kosovo, referring to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244. The Director of the Office of the Government of Serbia for Kosovo Petković also stated that they are seriously considering this. Nikola Lunić, Executive director of the Belgrade non-governmental Council for Strategic Policies, told *Radio Slobodna Evropa* that he believes that this is a populist statement aimed at the domestic political environment, but it is nevertheless quite dangerous. He pointed out that such a decision cannot be considered without KFOR and the UN. The President of Kosovo, Vjosa Osmani, assessed the announcement from Belgrade as "an open threat of police and military aggression from Serbia".
- **(10 December)** The President of Kosovo, Vjosa Osmani, announced on 10 December that the extraordinary local assemblies in the north have been postponed until April 2023. The countries of the “Quint” (France, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom, and the United States) welcomed the decision of the Government of Kosovo.
- **(10 December)** After the Kosovo police arrested a Serbian member of the Kosovo police force, Dejan Pantić, who is accused of organising an attack on the premises of the Central Electoral Commission, Kosovo Serbs set up barricades on several roads in northern Kosovo. The EU’s civilian mission in Kosovo (Eulex) announced that protesters attacked their patrol of armoured vehicles with stun grenades. Kosovo police also reported that they had experienced three gun attacks on one of the roads leading to the border with Serbia and responded with gunfire, driving the attackers away.
- **(11 December)** The Kosovo police issued a statement following the information circulated by Petković, the director of the Serbian Office for Kosovo, which was also widely published in Serbian media, that the Kosovo Special Forces (ROSU) stormed the Gazivode hydroelectric power plant and tortured the Serbs there. The statement explained that the Kosovo police is not present in that facility and has not abused any person or employee as reported by the media. They say that they merely attempted to identify the person at the mentioned location who was filming them and that no incident occurred.
- **(14 December)** Advisor to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Kosovo, Xhelala Sveccla, stated that Aleksandar Vučić's goal is to cause confusion and uncertainty among the members of the Serbian community in the north of Kosovo with the use of disinformation. He also said that there is no document or agreement that Kosovo's special forces are not allowed to operate in the north of the country.
- **(15 December)** The sixth day of the barricades in the north of Kosovo. US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Gabriel Escobar conducted separate talks with Kurti and Vučić. After that he stated that he sees progress and is therefore optimistic. He rejected the possibility of approving Serbian request to transfer the Serbian army to the north of Kosovo, as he is against the militarisation of the problem. He also added that the formation of the Community of Serbian Municipalities is legally binding according to the Brussels Agreement, so they will look for ways to make it happen.

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Montenegro:

- **(3 December)** The EU will allocate €30 million in grants to Montenegro in January 2023 to support the energy sector.
- **(6 December)** The statement on the Euro-Atlantic perspective of Ukraine was signed on 5 December by the President of Ukraine Volodimir Zelensky and the caretaker Prime Minister, Dritan Abazović, who also covers the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the dismissal of Ranko Krivokapić. The office of the President of Montenegro, Milo Đukanović, confirmed to *Radio Slobdna Evropa* that the Declaration on the Euro-Atlantic perspective of Ukraine was supposed to be signed at the level of the presidents of the two countries and that the document was originally addressed to Đukanović.
- **(10 December)** At the debate within the "Days of Srđan Aleksić" event in Banja Luka, Tamara Nikčević, a Montenegrin journalist, said that Montenegro is "under media occupation" due to activities of the media under the influence of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić. She says that the country is on the verge of a conflict, all institutions have been systematically destroyed and that a coup d'état is literally at work. She also estimates that the country, which was a leader in EU integration in 2020, is falling apart.
- **(12 December)** In Podgorica, there was a clash between the demonstrators and the police, after the Montenegrin Assembly in the second attempt adopted the amended law on the president, with the help of which the current parliamentary majority will take over some of the jurisdiction from president, Milo Đukanović.
- **(15 December)** A group of citizens blocked traffic in Cetinje at midday, and as a sign of protest, gatherings were also organised at the entrance to Mojkovac and Nikšić. The protesters demanded the withdrawal of the amended law on the president, while also calling for new parliamentary elections. They previously said their obligation was to "defend the country and the right to survival". The "Ima nas" movement has announced a new protest in front of the Montenegrin Assembly for Tuesday, 20 December.
- **(15 December)** The US special envoy for the Western Balkans, Gabriel Escobar estimated that Montenegro is in a "deep institutional crisis, almost in collapse" and said that it is necessary to establish a functioning constitutional court first, and then organise elections.

Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- **(1 December)** Members of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) took the oath of office, which is a step towards the establishment of a new government. The House of Representatives, which has 42 seats, is the highest legislative body in BiH.
- **(1 December)** The EU has announced an additional €10 million to strengthen the armed forces of BiH.
- **(1 December)** American Ambassador to BiH Michael Murphy expressed his congratulations on the occasion of the anniversary of the formation of the armed forces of BiH and announced additional financial assistance from the American administration in the amount of \$17 million.
- **(6 December)** Minister of State Miloš Lučić was arrested on suspicion of corruption.
- **(7 December)** The Deputy Speaker of the House of Nations of the BiH Parliament, Bakir Izetbegović, met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, who is visiting Sarajevo. He thanked Abdollahian for

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"the support that Iran continuously provides to BiH". Before the meeting, the Parliament of BiH announced that the members of the collegium of both houses of the Parliament will not meet with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran.

- **(15 December)** The leaders of the EU member states confirmed the candidate status for BiH during their summit in Brussels.
- **(15 December)** An agreement was signed on the operation of the new state government in BiH, which will be composed of the so-called party of "the eight", the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The agreement was signed by Nermin Nikšić, Dragan Čović and Milorad Dodik. If it is implemented, the Democratic Action Party (SDA) will go into opposition after several years of ruling.

Serbia:

- **(1 December)** The appointment of Aleksandar Vulin, the former Minister of Internal Affairs of Serbia, to the post of Director of the Security and Information Agency (BIA) raised a lot of dust both within and outside the country. He is a close associate of President Aleksandar Vučić and is being described as a propagator of the nationalist idea of a "Serbian world", who has repeatedly upset the public with his appearances, in which he uses contemptuous rhetoric directed at Croats and Albanians and relativises war crimes from the time of the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. Marinika Tepić, vice president of the opposition Freedom and Justice Party (SSP), says that Aleksandar Vulin is "a person who would never pass a security check in any normal country".
- **(6 December)** During the session, opposition MPs in the Serbian parliament supported the N1 and Nova S TV stations by standing up and holding up black cards with the words: "Darkness in Serbia, no free media". In the morning hours, instead of regular programs, the mentioned stations broadcast a telegraph with a black screen, on which was also written the message "Darkness in Serbia, no free media".
- **(7 December)** The Wagner paramilitary group, whose leader is Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian businessman and close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin, announced on his Telegram channel that their resident cultural and informational centre of friendship and cooperation "Orly" was formed in Serbia. They announced that they will deal with Russian liberals who fled from oppression to Serbia.
- **(9 December)** According to the Serbian portal *Danas*, Belgrade tabloids allegedly spread disinformation the day before the EU summit in Tirana. They supposedly reported that the Albanian opposition, led by Salilje Berisha, organised protests against the arrival of Aleksandar Vučić in Tirana and against his Open Balkans project. In fact, the protests were said to have exclusively targeted Edi Rama, accusing him of crime, corruption, and connections with the mafia. During his speech as the protest, Berisha did not make a single mention of Serbia or Vučić.
- **(9 December)** The Dutch parliament has called on the government to ask the European Commission to prepare a proposal by October 2023 at the latest, on the basis of which it can freeze Serbia's accession process for not harmonising its foreign policy with the EU, and especially because it has not imposed sanctions on Russia.

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Croatia:

- **(2 December)** The indictment panel of the Zagreb County Court confirmed the indictment against six members of the Air Force of the former Yugoslav National Army (JNA) for the rocket attack on Banske Dvore on 7 October 1991, in which they tried to liquidate then Croatian president Franjo Tuđman.
- **(6 December)** A Croatian Air Force MIG 21 crashed near Slatina in the Virovitiško-Podravaska County due to an engine failure. Both pilots survived the accident. Member of the parliamentary defence committee Željko Sačić (Sovereignists party) called on the Minister of Defence Marija Banožić to resign due to the crash.
- **(8 December)** The Ministers of the interior of the member states of the EU voted on 8 December to grant Croatian entry into the Schengen zone.

North Macedonia:

- **(11 December)** The Prime Minister of North Macedonia, Dimitar Kovačevski, said that he is a "rational optimist" and that he believes that his country's full membership in the EU by 2030 is an ambitious but achievable goal.
- **(14 December)** Prime Minister Kovačevski, issued a response to reports which have falsely claimed that bombings have been taking place in North Macedonia over the course of the last three months. He described the reports as a hybrid war.

Albania:

- **(6 December)** Former Albanian Prime Minister and leader of the opposition Democratic Party, Salji Berisha, was attacked at an anti-government protest he organised in Tirana during the EU-Western Balkans summit. The attacker was arrested, and Berisha said after the attack that "nothing will stop him from protesting against (Albanian Prime Minister) Edi Rama".

Kosovo:

- **(15 December)** On 15 December, Kosovo formally applied for full membership in the EU.

Other:

- **(6 December)** The leaders of the EU and the Western Balkans met in the Albanian capital Tirana. This was the first summit meeting in one of the countries of the Western Balkans. At the summit, they discussed pressing topics on which the future of these countries depends. Brussels called on candidate countries for EU membership to carry out reforms and harmonise with the EU's foreign and security policies. They welcomed the progress of Albania and North Macedonia while expressing concerns at Serbia's unwillingness to impose sanctions on Russia. Topics under discussion at the summit focused on strengthening cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans. Particular emphasis was given to the issues of enlargement, strengthening cooperation in the field of energy and the fight against illegal migration, the elimination of so-called data roaming, and the future of Europe in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

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