



CLOSE-UPS

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Executive Summary

In the Maghreb, Tunisia has suspended negotiations with the IMF, rejecting reforms required for a loan, raising concerns about inflation and investor confidence, while Morocco has lowered interest rates to stimulate economic growth and enhance strategic infrastructure, such as the port of Dakhla. In Algeria, relations with Spain have been restored, while in Libya, the National Oil Corporation has reopened bids for oil extraction despite internal difficulties. In South Sudan, internal conflicts have escalated, with Uganda intervening in support of President Kiir, while the war in Sudan has exacerbated the crisis. In Israel, internal tensions are rising, and protests against the government are increasing, while in Lebanon, Hezbollah continues to destabilize the region, as evidenced by missile launches against Israel, further escalating tensions with Syria. Globally, the visit of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to India has strengthened cooperation in areas such as trade, technology, and defense. India continues to serve as a strategic bridge between the Indo-Pacific and Europe. In the Western Balkans, North Macedonia faces internal tensions, with a divisive constitutional reform and protests against corruption.

In Europe, North Macedonia continued to face internal difficulties. The constitutional reform for the recognition of the Bulgarian minority became a divisive issue, fueling political and ethnic tensions. Disputes between the government and the judiciary raised concerns about the independence of the judicial system, while protests against corruption and resource management strained the country's social stability. Thus, the global landscape has been enriched by significant developments reflecting a world in continuous flux, where competition among great powers and the internal challenges of individual countries are increasingly intertwined.

The Maghreb's contrasting economic trajectories between Tunis and Rabat

Tunisia cuts all contact with the international monetary fund, while Morocco eases monetary policy by reducing key interest rates by another 25 basis points. Two decisions – announced this month respectively by the Carthage Palace and Bank al-Maghrib – that reflect foundational divergences in North African governance strategies.

Out of inclination and necessity, Tunisia is leaning towards autarky. The announcement from Carthage Palace follows statements by Tunisian President Kais Saied, who claimed that the IMF had exerted undue influence over the country's economic policy and sovereignty. This declaration came after nearly three years of negotiations between Tunisia and the IMF for approval of a \$1.9 billion loan, deemed crucial for the country's economic and financial stability. The loan disbursement, aimed at addressing the country's chronic financial instability, was conditioned upon the implementation of public reforms to reduce the wage bill, broaden the tax base, and cut subsidies to public employees—demands that Saied has consistently refused to implement, fearing they would destabilize an already fragile political and social balance.

Reelected in October, Saied now faces the task of stabilizing the Tunisian economy while maintaining a waning public consensus, as reflected in the historically low voter turnout during the latest elections. Saied's response has been to consolidate executive control over monetary policy, aiming to secure reluctant funds from the Central Bank of Tunisia. In January 2024, the president facilitated an amendment to the 2016 banking law, allowing the Central Bank to finance the treasury by purchasing government bonds, using domestic funds to patch the fiscal budget, but risking, in the medium term, exacerbating inflation and further discouraging foreign investment. Following this logic, Saied also attempted to ease government withdrawals by reducing interest rates – currently maintained at 8% to counter inflation – through a bill under review in Parliament that would grant the executive a say in monetary policy.

In Morocco, however, it is Bank al-Maghrib itself that has lowered interest rates from 2.5% to 2.2%. This is the second consecutive rate cut and the third since June, when the bank began gradually easing its monetary policy: a move reflecting cautious optimism about the kingdom's ability to keep inflation “around 2%” over the next two years.

The Bank's decision aims to facilitate the inflow of funds for the kingdom's ambitious infrastructure projects, including the expansion of the railway network (with a new coastal line between Casablanca and Agadir involving French and Chinese companies) and the enhancement of the port of Dakhla, the capital of Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara and a key node in the commercial corridor under development between the kingdom's Atlantic coast and Sahel countries. Investments are also growing in the energy sector, particularly in renewables and green hydrogen; desalination; steelmaking; and the automotive industry. Massive new investments are also planned for the 2030 FIFA World Cup, which Morocco will host alongside Spain and Portugal.

However, the North African kingdom will have to manage its extensive modernization program against the backdrop of a still-persistent informal economy and social tensions exacerbated by migration pressures at the southern borders. Moreover, inflationary pressures on foodstuffs persist, aggravated by the multi-year drought affecting the region and the challenges faced by trans-Mediterranean supply chains, further intensified by the ongoing Ukrainian conflict. Notably, while in Algeria, President Tebboune has chosen to rely on the massive importation of sheep, King Mohammed VI of Morocco has, for the first time in thirty years, urged the population to forgo the traditional sheep sacrifice for the Eid festival.

Francesco Meriano



Mourir pour Dakhla? Algiers seeks thaw with Spain and France

In a follow-up to the meeting between Algerian Interior Minister Merad and his Spanish counterpart Grande-Marlaska, Algeria has announced the resumption of commercial relations with Spain. This seems to momentarily smooth over the rift that originated between March and April 2022, when Madrid – traditionally a partner of Algiers – had expressed its support for Morocco's ambitions regarding Western Sahara. Since 1975, the region has been the focal point of rivalry between Morocco, which considers it part of its southern provinces, and Algeria, which supports the independence militias of the Polisario Front to block Rabat's access to a strategically valuable territory. In response to Spain's stance – dictated by the need to persuade Morocco to curb migration flows through the Strait of Gibraltar – Algiers had reacted by recalling its ambassador to Madrid and imposing a commercial embargo on Spain, with the sole exception of vital Algerian gas and oil exports.

Algiers had already hinted at a reconciliation at the end of 2023, allowing the return of its ambassador to Madrid, while the foreign ministers of Spain and Algeria met informally on the sidelines of the latest G20 summit. Meanwhile, energy supplies have never been interrupted. Algeria, whose economy is driven by the booming hydrocarbons sector, continued to supply Spain – one of the main importers of Algerian gas—with 131,202 GW/h in 2024. This is a significant figure, especially considering that Spain also became the largest exporter of gas to Morocco in 2024, through the reverse flow of the Maghreb-Europe Gas Pipeline (GME), which connects North Africa to the Iberian Peninsula.

This return to normalcy represents a bitter pill for Algeria, which, in light of Spain's (the third-largest global exporter) commercial contribution, has been brought back to more moderate positions. According to internal sources, the embargo had caused significant damage to Algerian importers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises. Moreover, the reconciliation occurs against the backdrop of a similar diplomatic defeat at the hands of France, which publicly endorsed Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara as "the only possible solution" to the dispute last July.

On this front too—despite some unofficial repercussions on the commercial level – Algeria has been unusually accommodating, with President Tebboune, at the end of March, merely referring to the debacle as a "misunderstanding" between "a European power" and "an African power." The underlying impression is that Algiers does not wish to jeopardize key partnerships, even when the stakes involve Western Sahara. This is discouraging news for the Polisario, whose goal – an independent Sahrawi nation—seems ever more distant.

Francesco Meriano



Libya returns to upstream

After seventeen years of silence, the National Oil Corporation (NOC), Libya's state-owned oil company, has announced a new round of bidding for upstream oil projects. Up for grabs are 22 blocks, equally divided between onshore and offshore, located in the Ghadames and Murzuq oil basins—nominally under the control of the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity—and along the coasts of the Gulf of Sirte, within the territory controlled by the rival Government of National Stability, which is effectively led by the clan of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. The blocks are estimated to contain accessible reserves of gas and oil totaling around 10 billion equivalent barrels, with the declared goal of boosting hydrocarbon production to a historic target of 2 million barrels per day.

This bidding process is the first since 2008 and marks a significant milestone for the country, which relies on gas and oil—representing 90% of national exports and about 60% of GDP—to recover from the turmoil of civil conflict. In this context, in recent years, the NOC has fostered a gradual increase in exports, rising from a low of 288,000 barrels per day in 2015 to 1.4 million barrels per day last December, the highest level since the fall of Gaddafi's Jamahiriya.

It remains to be seen how appealing the tender—announced and postponed multiple times over the past few years—will be to the major investors that Libya seeks to attract. The country's infrastructure deficiencies, exacerbated by over a decade of war, are compounded by the convergence of political interests among Libya's key actors. The struggle for control of the hydrocarbon sector already led to the dismissal in March of the Minister of Oil, Mohamed Aoun, who had been in open conflict with the former CEO of the NOC, Farhat Bengdara. Bengdara, accused of favoring foreign interests by selling off the country's resources, stepped down from his position at the helm of the NOC in late 2024 following investigations into his ties with the United Arab Emirates, which had mediated between Haftar and the Tripoli government, appointing him as NOC chief two years earlier.

The situation is further complicated by the emergence of a private oil company—the Arkenu Oil Company—linked to Haftar's clan and involved in the export of hydrocarbons from the Cyrenaica region controlled by the field marshal. In this context, Arkenu's activities signal the intention of Haftar's clan to break away from the NOC's monopoly and from the Central Bank of Libya, another strategic entity responsible for redistributing oil revenues between Tripoli and the eastern government. This further weakens the country's institutions in favor of the "strongmen" in Benghazi.

Francesco Meriano

Sahel: Putin meets President Sissoco-Embaló of Guinea-Bissau

While Volodymyr Zelenskyy was preparing to leave for the United States, Vladimir Putin hosted the President of Guinea-Bissau, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, at the Kremlin. The meeting between the two heads of state was the result of diplomatic efforts by Oleg Deripaska, a close friend of Vladimir Putin, and founder of RUSAL, the Russian mining and metallurgical giant. After he met with Putin, Embaló remained in Russia for an additional three days, during which he visited the Russian special forces academy in Grozny, managed by Adam Kadyrov, son of Chechen governor Ramzan Kadyrov. The content of the discussions between Putin and Embaló remains confidential, but the bilateral meeting allowed both leaders to showcase their respective narratives: Putin once again blamed the West for Africa's woes, attributing them to a neocolonial attitude, while Embaló praised the "brotherly relations" between Moscow and Bissau. Concrete developments from the meeting can be inferred from leaks within their entourages. Sources close to Embaló's office confirmed that the two leaders discussed the potential construction of railway infrastructure by Russian companies — a project aligned with Deripaska's interest in the exploration of bauxite deposits in the West African country — as well as strengthening the bilateral cooperation in the defense and energy sectors. At the same time, Embaló's interest in strengthening ties with Russia is linked to the many issues he is facing at home. The Guinean President's mandate expired last fall and elections, originally scheduled for 2024, have been postponed and according to Embaló himself, they will not take place before the end of the year. In addition, Embaló dissolved the opposition-controlled parliament two years ago, citing an alleged coup attempt. In this context, the government of Guinea-Bissau is facing mounting pressure from ECOWAS, which is calling for a return to the polls and the restoration of democratic governance. During Embaló's visit to Moscow, a delegation from the regional organization was in Bissau to draft a transition roadmap to present to the president upon his return. However, after returning from Russia, Embaló threatened to expel ECOWAS officials, who consequently ended the mission and left the country. Shortly thereafter, the president announced his intention to run in the next presidential elections — a move that is formally legitimate, considering that Embaló is still serving his first term. This suggests the emergence of a possible exchange of resources and political support between Bissau and Moscow. This hypothesis is further reinforced by the increase in disinformation campaigns within the country — a hallmark of the Kremlin's strategy in Africa, previously deployed in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso to support the rise of governments aligned with Russian interests. Bringing Guinea-Bissau into Moscow's sphere of influence would also serve the shared objective of Russia and the Sahel juntas: securing direct access to the Atlantic Ocean. In this context, the geopolitical implications of the next elections in Guinea-Bissau are growing in importance.

Luciano Pollichieni

Horn of Africa: South Sudan on the brink

South Sudan's internal tensions reached a new peak when the White Army armed group (aligned with Vice President Riek Machar) attacked a military base in Nasir, the capital of Upper Nile State. The UN mission in the country, UNMISS, attempted to evacuate some officers from the base, and during the operation, a peacekeeper was killed. The assault on Nasir followed the arrest by South Sudanese forces loyal to President Salva Kiir of General Gabriel Duop Lam, Deputy Chief of Staff, and the powerful Petroleum Minister Puot Kang Chol – both supporters of Vice President Machar. Shortly after, Machar's residence was surrounded, and he was placed under house arrest. Meanwhile, Ugandan special forces landed in Juba to protect President Kiir, as confirmed by both the spokesperson of the Kampala army and the head of Uganda's armed forces, Muhoozi Kainerugaba (son of President Yoweri Museveni). Kainerugaba also stated on X that any attack against President Kiir would be considered a declaration of war against Uganda. In the following days, the government in Juba launched airstrikes in the Upper Nile region targeting White Army positions, while Ugandan special forces are reportedly participating in operations around the vice president's residence. Germany and the United States have repatriated non-essential diplomatic staff and suspended regular operations within their embassies. The new wave of clashes marks the obsolescence and failure of the 2018 peace agreements, which have proven unable to withstand the internal transition challenges and the broader geopolitical shocks in the region—particularly those stemming from the ongoing war in Sudan. On one hand, speculation about President Kiir's health – he has appeared in public rarely and often in a seemingly confused state – fuels the narrative of an oligarchic system around the presidency intent on preserving its privileges. This may explain certain decisions made in the last months, such as the removal of the former powerful intelligence chief Agol Koor Kuc. Subsequently, the poorly calculated opportunism of the South Sudanese presidency led to a rupture with Sudan's regular army, after the SPLM-N armed movement allied with Kiir joined the exiled government supported by the RSF. This now jeopardizes control over the oil-rich northern regions, where SAF influence remains strong. Then there is the economic crisis. Fighting in Sudan has almost entirely crippled South Sudan's energy industry, undermining the financial pipeline that sustained the 2018 peace deal and both Kiir and Machar patronage systems. In a country where military personnel and civil servants have gone unpaid for months, if not years, political violence becomes an increasingly viable option. IGAD and the African Union are working to bring the parties back to the negotiating table, but for now, the prospects for successful mediation appear limited.

Luciano Pollichieni



Israel: a democracy in crisis?

The ceasefire in Gaza did not hold, and the war has resumed. The sometimes-confused negotiation attempts of recent weeks, with massive involvement from the United States and numerous direct comments from President Trump, have led to Hamas refusing to release the hostages still held in the Strip. At this moment, they remain its last bargaining chip.

However, Israel also faces other internal issues. One major concern is the increasingly intense and widespread protests calling for an end to the war and the safe return of all living hostages, as well as the bodies of those killed. The physical and mental conditions of those who have been released have been particularly shocking for everyone. The families and many citizens fear, understandably, for the lives of those still imprisoned in Gaza and accuse the government of abandoning them.

The most delicate issue, however, is the political and institutional crisis. The government is facing fierce protests following the dismissal of Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar. Netanyahu, who had already removed him from the Israeli negotiation team for the hostage release – along with Mossad chief Barnea – stated that he had lost confidence in him after the events of October 7, 2023. The prime minister added that Bar was too "soft" and not "aggressive" enough during negotiations. After the decision, which was unanimously approved by the cabinet, the Israeli High Court issued a temporary injunction preventing the prime minister from appointing a new head of internal security services but allowing him to conduct interviews to fill the position. The Court will hear petitions in favor of Bar by April 8. The cabinet has decided that he must leave office by April 10 at the latest.

The power struggle between the government and the judiciary seems also to be escalating. Notably, it was Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara who warned the prime minister not to take further steps against Bar. Her relationship with the government, and Netanyahu in particular, has always been difficult to say the least. Shortly after the decision to dismiss the Shin Bet chief, the government passed a vote of no confidence against her. This marks the first step in a process that could lead to her removal. Justice Minister Yariv Levin, who initiated the dismissal process, accused her of "inappropriate behaviour." Levin also highlighted fundamental disagreements that, in his view, prevent "effective cooperation." However, before proceeding with her dismissal, the opinion of the selection committee that appointed her must be heard. The attorney general responded by accusing the government of trying to place itself above the law and operate outside check and balances. The opposition also strongly protested, accusing Netanyahu of lying about the reasons behind the dismissal attempt. More than 100,000 citizens have taken to the streets to protest the government's latest moves. Yair Lapid, leader of the opposition party Yesh Atid, stated that the prime minister is "doing everything possible to start a civil war" and has called for a general strike should the government defy the High Court's injunction regarding Ronen Bar's dismissal.



As if that weren't enough, on March 27, the Knesset passed a law that, for the first time in Israel's history, effectively places the judicial selection process under political control. This highly controversial and divisive law passed without opposition votes, as opposition members boycotted the final ballot by walking out of parliament in protest.

The serious tensions and citizen protests surrounding judicial reform date back to before October 7 and the war in Gaza. Those demonstrations, which lasted for months and culminated in reservists refusing to report for duty, had managed to delay the process. Now, however, the government has succeeded where it previously failed, passing a law considered the cornerstone of the reform. Together with the moves against Bar and Baharav-Miara, the law could create a deep rupture in the country. While it is unlikely that a full-blown reckoning will take place during an ongoing conflict, the political landscape remains extremely turbulent, raising concerns about the stability of Israel's democracy. Netanyahu insists that his country's democracy is not at risk, and Trump supports him.

Anna Maria Cossiga



In Lebanon, tensions with Syria and Israel

Peace appears almost impossible for Lebanon. The fall of Bashar Al Assad in Syria, the ceasefire with Israel—albeit somewhat intermittent—and the new president and government seemed initially to offer a chance of recovery for this country after decades of severe economic, political, and social struggles. Recent events at the end of March, however, suggest otherwise.

On the Israeli front, Beirut and Tel Aviv, with the mediation of the United States, agreed in mid-March to start negotiations on border disputes. The consultations will also address the future of five Israeli outposts still present on Lebanese territory and the release of Lebanese prisoners held by Israel. The office of Prime Minister Netanyahu has agreed to set up three specific working groups, each dedicated to these issues. Although the exact timing and format of such negotiations remain unclear, the mere possibility of direct dialogue between these traditionally fierce adversaries would already be good news—particularly for Lebanon, trying to become a “new” sovereign without foreign interferences. The bad news, however, is that Hezbollah, despite being weakened militarily and politically, seems intent on disrupting the plans of a newly born government that seeks a more peaceful future for Lebanon through dialogue with Israel, too. This is, moreover, the government that has humiliated the Party of God by including only two of its members in the new executive. Therefore, on the 22nd of the month, Hezbollah launched six missiles against northern Israel; only three hit their intended targets, breaching the ceasefire agreed in January. The IDF responded with a series of attacks across Lebanese territory, destroying the infrastructure, weapons depots, and missile launch sites of the Shiite organization. Hezbollah denied any involvement, asserting instead its support to the Lebanese state against what it described as a “dangerous Zionist escalation.”

Tensions have also flared on the Syrian border. Three soldiers from Damascus's new army were killed during clashes with armed groups believed to be affiliated with Hezbollah. Clan members claimed to have reacted when the Lebanese army crossed the border, an accusation that was categorically denied. Accounts of the incident are contradictory: the Syrian Defence Minister claims Hezbollah entered Syria, kidnapped three soldiers, and transferred them to Lebanon, where they were subsequently killed. Hezbollah, however, insists that Syrian soldiers crossed the border, provoking a reaction from the “Shiite clans.” Seven Lebanese citizens were also killed in these clashes. The Lebanese Air Force intervened to end the hostilities, targeting Syrian artillery positions—a direct military intervention unprecedented until now. Despite reaching a ceasefire agreement, the situation remains alarming. Numerous press sources claim that anti-tank Kornet missiles, Russian-made weapons possessed by Hezbollah but not by the Lebanese army, were fired at Syria.



The border between Lebanon and Syria has always been porous and never officially defined. Throughout the long years of war, Hezbollah, an ally of the Assad regime, extended its influence across the border, establishing social, economic, and military networks facilitating both legal and illegal activities. Although the Party of God denies involvement in recent clashes, it is clear the establishment of two states wanting to be sovereign ones on their territory, without the involvement of third parties or of non-state actors, does not favour Hezbollah. The recent incidents along the Lebanese-Syrian border do not appear to be mere skirmishes between rival clans, but rather part of Hezbollah's broader efforts to maintain dominance within two countries attempting political, economic, and social reconstruction. It is important to remember that cross-border activities remain a significant source of revenue for Hezbollah, particularly as its primary sponsor, Iran, is now weaker. Convincing the Party of God to relinquish its remaining power and agree to disarmament will not be easy. The missile launches against Israel and the incidents at the Syrian border appear to be warnings to those supporting state reconstruction efforts in Lebanon and Syria. Whether Hezbollah will succeed in its endeavours, however, remains uncertain.

Anna Maria Cossiga



EU and India announce new joint initiatives on Trade and Technology, Defence and Security, Connectivity and Global Partnership

Scheduled for months, the visit of the President of the European Commission and the almost full College of Commissioners to India took place just days after Trump and Zelensky's meeting in Washington, which fueled a sense of urgency in realizing common goals.

'This world is full of dangers, but I believe this modern version of competition between great powers is an opportunity for Europe and India to rethink their partnership,' said Von der Leyen.

After more than two decades of strategic partnership, the Indian Prime Minister and the President of the European Commission agreed on the need for new synergies along three lines.

First among them, *trade and technology*. The EU is India's most important trading partner, ahead of China and the US. Last year, trade was worth EUR 120 billion, and bilateral trade has tripled in the last 20 years. European companies have created 8 million jobs in India. However, these results could improve with the lowering of customs barriers. To this end, the EU and India started negotiations for a far-reaching bilateral free trade agreement back in 2007. After several rounds of negotiations, the talks between the parties broke down in 2013 due to the diverging positions of the counterparts. On 8 May 2021, the leaders of the EU and India agreed to resume talks on a 'balanced, ambitious, comprehensive and mutually beneficial' trade agreement and to start separate negotiations on an investment protection agreement and an agreement on geographical indications. In parallel, the EU-India Trade and Technology Council was established in April 2022, formed at ministerial level (previously implemented by the EU only with the United States), designed to deepen collaboration in the field of innovation, particularly in the digital sector. There have been six rounds of FTA negotiations since 2022 (in July, October, and November-December 2022, as well as in March, June, and October 2023, respectively), with limited, uneven progress in the various areas of interest. Significant, therefore, was the willingness expressed by Modi and Von der Leyen at their meeting on 28 February to give new impetus to the negotiations in order to reach the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement by the end of 2025.

The second broad area of cooperation mentioned by the two leaders was *defence and security*. The Indian Prime Minister and the President of the Commission welcomed the cooperation in the maritime field (e.g., in the Atalanta anti-piracy mission) and India's interest in involvement in industrial projects under EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).



They also welcomed the commitment to negotiate a Security of Information Agreement (SoIA). Both looked forward to the emergence of a security and defence partnership, modelled on those the EU has initiated with Japan and Korea, to counter common threats, be it cross-border terrorism, maritime security, cyber-attacks or attacks on critical infrastructure.

The third chapter evoked by the leaders was the need to invest in *connectivity and bilateral global partnership*. India can indeed play, in the European vision, a bridging role with the Global South, between the Indo-Pacific and Europe. In this regard, she emphasized the 'Global Gateway' initiative, a global infrastructure offering totaling EUR 300 billion. Von der Leyen made specific reference to possible energy projects, as well as the IMEC infrastructure corridor, launched in Delhi in 2023 on the occasion of the Indian G20 Presidency.

The alignment of economic and strategic interests between the European Union and India seems to be conducive to decisive developments. The result of the forthcoming negotiation rounds on the free trade agreement will be significant for understanding whether the objectives stated on the occasion of this visit will be achievable with the urgency that the international situation seems to require.

Beatrice Arborio Mella

Western Balkans: North Macedonia between institutional contradictions, mass protest and the risk of inter-ethnic tensions

North Macedonia has been an official candidate for European Union membership since December 2005, and the European Council decided to open accession negotiations in March 2020. Aligned with the EU's common foreign and security policy, and as a member of NATO (with former Defence Minister Radmila Šekerinska serving as Deputy Secretary-General of NATO since December 2024), the country must, however, amend its Constitution to recognize a Bulgarian minority among the state's constituent peoples, as required by Bulgaria. This would require a two-thirds majority in Parliament and is widely unpopular among voters. According to the ruling party, VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity), which has 59 seats out of 120 and forms a majority with the support of a coalition of Albanian ethnic citizens, Vlen ("Vale"), the solution could be for Parliament to vote on the constitutional reform with a clause that the changes will only take effect once the accession negotiations are complete. This proposal, however, would still require the support of part of the opposition and approval from the European Union.

In a stalemate over this necessary reform, the country is now also experiencing institutional clashes and mass protests. This has been triggered by two main events: on one hand, Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski's attempt to remove five members of the Judicial Council by having a motion approved by Parliament on March 11, which Parliament does not have the power to do; on the other hand, the tragic fire in a nightclub in Kočani in the early hours of March 16, which killed 59 people and injured more than 150, nearly all of them young people. While the conflict between the Prime Minister and the judiciary and prosecution leadership, which accuses them of political affiliations with the previous government, has been described by the European Parliament's rapporteur for North Macedonia, Thomas Waitz, as "a worrying signal of political interference in the judicial system," the fire has sparked furious demonstrations against corruption, which allegedly allowed the nightclub to obtain a license despite lacking basic safety requirements. Sixteen people have been arrested, including the former Minister of Economy (from 2017 to 2024) Kreshnik Bekteshi and several officials from ministries and other agencies responsible for oversight. Kočani's mayor, Ljupčo Papazov, has resigned. The level of corruption in the country has been described as "catastrophic" by Interior Minister Panče Toškovski (in office since January 2024).

Regarding interethnic relations, the situation, which has so far been relatively stable, does not appear to be consolidated. The Constitution recognizes the presence of minority communities, including Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, and Roma, and with amendments, special emphasis could be given to the inclusion of a Bulgarian minority as well as the potential recognition of Croatian, Montenegrin, Slovenian, Jewish, and Balkan Egyptian communities.

While the Albanian coalition Vlen supports the government, the other and larger group representing the Albanian minority, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), has used several legal proceedings in recent months before the Constitutional Court to spread the theory that the rights of Albanians (who make up more than a quarter of the country's approximately 1.8 million inhabitants) are being threatened by attempts to establish a "Macedonian hegemony." The 2018 language law, which extended the official use of Albanian in institutions such as municipalities, hospitals, and courts across the entire country (rather than just in areas where Albanians constitute more than 20% of the population), is currently under review by the Court. The Court, likely aware of the risks to stability that a potential repeal could cause, has decided to defer any decision pending the opinion of international experts.

Antonio Stango