



**Hermes Institute of  
International Affairs,  
Security & Geoeconomy**

**SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE**

**AT A GLANCE**



**SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE**

“SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE” (ISSN: 2654-0304) is a weekly review of the most significant current political, economic, energy, defense, and security news of Southeastern Europe. It covers 14 countries; Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Kosovo\*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey.

This ambitious newsletter aspires to become an informative “tool” for anyone who is interested in the region and wishes to have knowledge of the non-stop current developments and challenges. “HERMES” Institute is not a news agency and it is not one of its ambitions to become one but it is strongly believed that today’s events provide the necessary material to understand the future and to analyze situations that may affect in peace, stability, and growth of the region.

#### **“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE**

“HERMES” Institute of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy (“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE) is an independent, non – governmental, non – profit organization, consisting of scholars dedicated in the research and analysis of international affairs in regional and global level. The Institute aims at providing objective, scientific, and reliable research analysis through a variety of studies contributing effectively and constructively in the public dialogue and the evolution of scientific knowledge.

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\*Kosovo declared unilaterally its independence from Serbia in 2008 but it is not a UN member state.

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**ALBANIA:** January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024 will bring changes in the Socialist Party of Albania's (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS) parliamentary group since its MP Arben Ahmetaj - who is currently on the run due to corruption charges – should be replaced by a new person after he was absent from the Parliament's works for 6 months. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

- January 3<sup>rd</sup>, the former President and Prime Minister Sali Berisha's, defense lawyer Sokol Mengjesi said that he appealed the decision of judge Irena Gjoka for the measure of house arrest for Berisha. (www.top-channel.tv)



Former President and Prime Minister, Sali Berisha

(photo source: www.pdsh.al)

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, Vangjel Tavo has rejected the claims of the Greek media that Prime Minister Edi Rama has asked him to take over the leadership of the municipality of Chimera. A day before, the Greek newspaper “Kathimerini” wrote that the “*the Prime Minister Edi Rama has proposed Vangjel Tavo as the temporary Mayor*

*of the Municipality of Chimera.”* (www.gazetashqiptare.al)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*The Prime Minister, Edi Rama and the ruling Socialist Party (PS) remain the absolute dominants of the state politics taking in advantage the absence of a strong and effective opposition. Prosecution of former President and Prime Minister, Sali Berisha maintains a situation of political tension, but Berisha does not have the political status to transform his penal charges into political motivation for his supporters. Besides, main opposition party, PD suffers from a long internal rivalry which has divided it into two factions, leaving no spare room for effective opposition action towards the social and economic problems of the country. The “Belery” case not only strains the Albanian – Greek relations, but also poses obstacles in Albania's accession talks with the EU. Despite tangible steps of Albania towards eliminating impunity – Berisha's prosecution is included in this effort - and reforming justice, the country should focus on fighting corruption and organized crime, establishing rule of law and public transparency, eliminating state officials' immunity and modernizing public administration.*



## BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

January 1<sup>st</sup>, the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is investigating the information presented a month ago by the BiH's Minister of Defense, Zukan Helez about the existence of military training camps in the territory of the Republika Srpska (RS) entity (in the area of Rogatica, in eastern BiH, and in the area of the mountain Maglic) in which there are

also people from Russia. (www.sarajevo times.com)

- January 3<sup>rd</sup>, the President of the Republika Srpska (RS), Milorad Dodik said that “*the RS is determined to create a new electoral law of that entity that is in accordance with the constitutions of the Republika Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina.*” (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, the new commander of the EUFOR ALTHEA mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Major General Laszlo Sticz, claimed that EUFOR forces would intervene in the country only if the BiH Police would not be able to ensure peace. However, he pointed out, as in Kosovo, the situation can escalate at any time. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Republika Srpska's President, Milorad Dodik maintains his nationalist rhetoric challenging the sustainability of the Dayton Peace Accords and the peaceful coexistence of Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of BiH. His new initiative for a new electoral law for the Serbian entity actually takes away the BiH's electoral control of RS. The US Embassy did not hesitate to warn Dodik with “a timely and adequate response by the US” against any attempt of violating the Dayton Agreement and the competences of BiH, sending a clear message to the Republika Srpska's President. Under these circumstances, instability and uncertainty reign in BiH. The state politics are hostage of the ethnic interests and pursuits of the entities. Republika Srpska (RS) remains keen on its secessionist policy undermining implementation of Dayton Accords. Hatred rhetoric from all sides escalates tension further*

*between the three entities. Although the Dayton Peace Agreement terminated a bloody war, it appears outdated, maintaining a non-functional state. Under these circumstances, there is fertile soil for ethnic disputes which could escalate tension into a conflict. Russian influence remains high in Republika Srpska. Political instability, poor economic performances and non-functional state institutions contribute in absence of rule of law, shortages in respect of human rights, weak public administration, democratic deficit, high levels of corruption and social distress.*



**BULGARIA:** January 3<sup>rd</sup>, Transport Minister Georgi Gvozdeikov revealed Bulgaria's prospects for full Schengen membership, linking it to the impending adoption of the euro. Gvozdeikov anticipates a lift in land border controls as the country aims for full Schengen integration by the year's end, coinciding with the projected euro adoption in 2025. Initially, Bulgaria and Romania are slated for Schengen entry by air and water in March 2024, with ongoing negotiations expected to lift land restrictions throughout the year. (www.novinite.com)

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, Bulgaria's Defense Minister, Todor Tagarev dismissed speculations about dispatching a warship to the Red Sea, asserting that Parliament's approval is imperative for any military mission. (www.novinite.com)

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) leader, Boyko Borissov considers the impending prime ministerial rotation as a procedural transition, emphasizing the need for continuity during

Mariya Gabriel's tenure. Gabriel would assume the Prime Minister's post from the current Premier, Nikolai Denkov as per the Government rotation in March 2024. (www.novinite.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*Bulgarian ruling coalition enjoys the success of the partial acceptance into the Schengen zone. Actually, the Schengen zone accession was a long strategic goal of Bulgaria and undoubtedly the positive signal of European Commission is considering as a substantial national success. Of course, there is still the demanding process of negotiations for the land borders which will signify the full membership of Bulgaria in the Schengen zone. After a long political crisis Bulgaria enjoys political stability with tangible results in the social and economic fields. Military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force.*



**CROATIA:** January 3<sup>rd</sup>, Croatia, seeks to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), but has made little progress in 2023 in meeting the requirements being the last among the six candidates in terms of the number of the requirements met, per the OECD. (www.n1info.com)

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, the Croatian Air Force will be the strongest in the area between Germany and Greece with the 12 multi-purpose RAFALE fighter jets purchased from France, the Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said from Paris on Friday. Plenkovic said that everything was going as planned, and the first aircraft should

arrive in Croatia at the end of April 2024. (www.n1info.com)

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic reacted in the President Zoran Milanovic's statement that a politically independent and non-partisan person should be elected to the position of state Attorney General. Plenkovic said that the process of appointing the new state Attorney-General will take place in accordance with the law and that the Government "will not violate legal provisions like President Zoran Milanovic" in nomination of the President of the Supreme Court. (www.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*Croatia enjoys political stability and favorable conditions for economic growth and a more attractive environment for investments. The country has to intensify in 2024 its efforts towards its accession to OECD; the last foreign policy goal after having joined the Eurozone and the Schengen area in 2023. Croatia is strengthening its military capabilities by the acquisition of modern armaments having the aspiration to become a strong - in defense terms – country.*



**CYPRUS:** January 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Cypriot Defense Minister, Michalis Giorgallas revealed the military plans to beef up the country's air defense systems within the year. According to Giorgallas, the new air defense system will be even more "powerful" than Israel's IRON DOME. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres announced the appointment of Maria

Angela Holguin Cuellar as his “personal envoy” to Cyprus. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 7<sup>th</sup>, the President Nikos Christodoulides in a letter to the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres (dated 22nd December, 2023) requested the UN intervene on Cyprus’ behalf to stop Turkish violations in the buffer zone. Christodoulides expressed “deep concern” that continued violations “could lead to a serious crisis.” (www.cyprus-mail.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*Energy security is among the top priorities of the Cyprus republic, but the island has not produced any gas so far. It is vital for Cypriot interests to achieve eventually exploitation of natural gas and its transfer to international energy market. Strategic cooperation with Israel and Egypt is of great importance because Cyprus needs partners in its energy project. Despite the appointment of a new “personal envoy” by the UN Secretary General for the Cypriot question, conditions are not encouraging and optimistic for any positive step or productive initiative in 2024. Turkish Cypriot activity in buffer zone raises concerns for escalation of tension, but it seems that situation is currently stable. Cyprus seeks to implement an ambitious armament program for modernizing its Armed Forces capabilities. Purchase of a new air defense system such as the Israeli BARAK MX could upgrade dramatically the Cypriot capabilities (signaling also a major shift from Russian made armaments). Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps size). As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in*

*the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.*



**GREECE:** January 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Armed Forces’ “Unified Medium - Term Development and Modernization Program” which will determine procurement priorities for the next five years, is expected to take shape by the end of March. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced a mini cabinet reshuffle in a bid to bolster the Government’s security agenda. Michalis Chrysohoidis was moved from the Health Ministry to the Civil Protection Ministry, while Adonis Georgiadis was moved from the Labor to the Health Ministry. Domna Michailidou, who was Deputy Education Minister, will be replacing Georgiadis. Additionally, Andreas Nikolakopoulos took over as Deputy Citizen Protection Minister and Ioanna Lytrivi as Deputy Education Minister. Minister for Citizen Protection Giannis Oikonomou was ousted from the Government, following an increase in violence at sporting events. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis met with the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Hania, Crete and discussed about Gaza, Ukraine, Greek - Turkish relations and defense matters. (www.ekathimerini.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*The Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis and his conservative Government are considered as the absolute dominants in the Greek political landscape. Mitsotakis promotes an ambitious*

*reforming agenda touching sensitive social issues such as the same sex marriage, while he bolsters the economy by creating an attractive investment environment aiming to attract foreign capitals. Normalization of relations with Turkey is the main challenge in foreign policy and the Government is working towards this direction. Greece implements an ambitious armament procurement program which includes RAFALE and F-35 fighter jets, BELHARA frigates and other modern systems (MH-60R helicopters, SEAHAKE Mod 4 torpedoes, SPIKE NLOS guided missiles etc) seeking to maintain military balance with Turkey. The country enjoys an upgraded relationship with Washington which was re-confirmed in the last visit of the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Greece.*



**KOSOVO:** January 1st, the EU visa liberalization for the citizens of Kosovo took effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 allowing them free travel to Union member states. (www.n1info.com)

- January 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Kosovo Minister of Defense, Ejup Maqedonci, stated that the country is in danger from the constant threats from Serbia, since the latter is supporting armed paramilitary groups. (www.kossovapress.com)

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, the Kosovo Government revoked the mandatory stickers covering the Serbian coat of arms on Belgrade-issued vehicle license plates. (www.n1info.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** :

*2024 has brought good news for Kosovo since the EU announced the liberation of visa for (Kosovo)*

*citizens who travel to the EU countries. Visa liberalization was Pristina's longtime request and its implementation upgrades the status of Kosovo citizens. It is considered also as a success of the Government of Albin Kurti. Mutual compromise between Belgrade and Pristina in the car license plates issue is a step towards de-escalation of tension in the region. However, 2024 will bring new challenges for the two countries which could contribute in normalization of relations between them or could become sources of tension. The establishment of the Association of Serbian Municipalities by Pristina and dialogue between the two parts are considered as the main challenges ahead. Kosovo needs urgently institutional reforms especially in the fields of economy, rule of law, public administration, justice and democratic rule. Organized crime, corruption, money laundering, weak public administration, absence of rule of law, controlled justice, transactions between politicians and criminals are persistent "open sores" for Kosovo. However, normalization of relations with Serbia and recognition of Kosovo as an independent state is critical for its future and this would not happen without compromise and cost.*



**MOLDOVA:** January 2<sup>nd</sup>, Moldova and NATO are preparing for a new form of partnership which will upgrade the existing cooperation. The new partnership will include a wide range of areas of cooperation (from cyber defense to disinformation, to climate change) and will take into account the threats that Russia poses for Moldova. (www.ipn.md)

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Dorin Recean has announced that as of the beginning of this year, Moldova is officially a member of the European



Union's Civil Protection Mechanism – an initiative for coordination in crisis and natural disaster situations. (www.moldovalive.md)

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, Russia continues to pose one of the most significant threats to Moldova, stated Defense Minister Anatolie Nosatii in an interview with Moldova1. According to the Minister, the war in Ukraine has prompted the authorities in Chisinau to enhance their resilience capabilities, acquire radars, and monitor the airspace. (www.moldovalive.md)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Moldova - together with Romania - is considered as the forward bastion of the west regarding the Ukrainian front and the Russian threat against the Euro-Atlantic security. Thus the pro-western Government of the country enjoys political and economic support by the EU and the US. Brussels fully support the European prospect of Moldova and the opening of accession talks in December 2023 confirmed this fact. The Moldovan Government should accelerate economic, administrative and judicial reforms in order to fight corruption, establish rule of law, develop transparent and accountable public administration, and strengthen democratic rule. Social policy should be top priority for the ruling majority since Moldovan society is suffering from poverty and lack of social care. However, Russian influence does exist in the country. Moldova remains fully dependent on Russian gas, while Russian troops station in Transnistria. The clean pro-western orientation of Moldova could trigger hybrid or asymmetric attacks of Russia in Moldovan infrastructure (according to some state officials this already happens). Transnistria could*

*always become a factor of destabilization of Moldova. Moldovan territory is of vital strategic importance for Russia and NATO. It shares borders with Ukraine and the NATO member, Romania.*



**MONTENEGRO:** January 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Economic Policy and Minister of Economic Development Nik Gjeshaj said in an interview for the CdM portal that the majority of Albanians supported the entry of the Albanian Forum into the Government of Montenegro. Gjeshaj underlined that jeopardizing key democratic principles, the pro-Western course of the state, membership in the EU, complete alignment of Montenegro's foreign and security policy with the policy of the EU and NATO, and of course the issue of Kosovo's independence, are the red lines of his remaining in the Government. (www.cdm.me)

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, the European Affairs Minister, Maida Gorcevic said in an interview that the foreign policy priorities of this Government would not be questioned emphasizing that the top priority is the EU integration. Gorcevic underlined that flawed institutions over the past period impacted the implementation of requirements and slowing down Montenegro's European path. (www.cdm.me)

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister, Milojko Spajic expressed his apology for the incident in Kotor where three Albanians were harassed by eight people wearing military uniforms. The Democratic Union of Albanians has condemned the incident. Spajic emphasized that Montenegro must and is going to be an oasis of peace and stability for everybody. (www.cdm.me)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

*Currently, Montenegro ruling coalition appears stable. According to the Government's Ministers the EU accession process is a top strategic priority. However, it is expected DF to enter the Government this year; a development that could question the Government's orientation. Not only that, but it could test the cohesion of the ruling coalition. The country faces strong challenges such as the need for concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability.*



**NORTH MACEDONIA:** January 3<sup>rd</sup>, leader of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE), Hristijan Mickoski said that the party's executives who will join the caretaker Government will be announced after January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024 (the day of the Epiphany celebration). (www.mia.mk)

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, Bojan Marichikj met with the US Ambassador in Skopje, Angela Aggeler and agreed that the two countries should strengthen cooperation regarding North Macedonia's necessary rule of law and public administration reforms towards its EU accession process. Moreover, the two parts emphasized in the North Macedonia's commitment towards the implementation of the New Growth Plan for the

Western Balkans; an EU project for the stability and prosperity of the region. (www.mia.mk)



Meeting of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, Bojan Marichikj with the US Ambassador in Skopje, Angela Aggeler  
(Photo source: www.sep.gov.mk)

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister, Dimitar Kovachevski in consultation with the Defense Minister, Slavjanka Petrovska and the Transport and Communication Minister, Blagoj Bochvarski has decided to promote the dismissal of the managing board and all the managers of the national air navigation service M-NAV in an effort to resolve current tension in the provider and more specific after the incident on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024 when eight people including the M-NAV executive advisor breached the air-traffic facility and assaulted the staff, endangering the national and international air traffic. (www.mia.mk)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

*2024 is a year of presidential (April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024 the first round and May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024 the second round if needed) and parliamentary (May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024). Consequently, the country will start entering gradually into the pre-electoral atmosphere. 100 days before the elections the ruling coalition will hand over power to a caretaker Government*

*which will ensure free and fair elections. The opening of accession negotiations was a big success for the country but the ruling coalition needs to accelerate reforms on public administration, rule of law, justice, political impunity and fight against corruption and organized crime.*



**ROMANIA:** January 3<sup>rd</sup>, NATO said that its procurement division is to support a group of member countries, including Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Spain, on a contract to buy up to 1,000 Patriot air defense missiles. ([www.romaniajournal.ro](http://www.romaniajournal.ro))

- January 3<sup>rd</sup>, Romania's Defense Minister, Angel Tilvar, recently announced a scheduled increase of foreign military personnel stationed in the country. The increase is set to take place following discussions with officials from Slovenia, Italy, and Spain. ([www.romania-insider.com](http://www.romania-insider.com))

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, the decision of the Council of the European Union of December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023 regarding the partial accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the Schengen Area was published in the Official Journal of the EU. According to the document, starting from March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024, controls on people at the internal air and maritime borders with and between Bulgaria and Romania are eliminated and the provisions of the Schengen acquis apply to Bulgaria and Romania among themselves and in their relations with the other member countries of the free circulation. ([www.romaniajournal.ro](http://www.romaniajournal.ro))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*2024 has started with the best options for Romania since it became a partial member of the Schengen zone regarding air and maritime borders (but not on land borders); a strategic goal for the country which came true. The country should remain focus on reforms in public administration, rule of law, tax administration and sustainability of public finances. Romania is in the forward bastion of NATO in the eastern flank with upgraded role due to the war in Ukraine. NATO troops and weapons are stationing in Romania. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air and sea defense missile systems etc) is a top priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO.*



**SERBIA:** January 3<sup>rd</sup>, Serbia's Central Election Commission (RIK) released the unofficial final results of the December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023 parliamentary elections and two rounds of reruns at a small number of polling stations. The portal shows that the ruling Serbian Progressive Party's (Srpska Napredna Stranka – SNS) won 46.75% of the votes cast followed by the Serbia Against Violence (Srbija Protiv Nasilja - SPN) opposition coalition which won 23.66% of the votes. ([www.rs.n1info.com](http://www.rs.n1info.com))

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, the Minister of Defense, Milos Vucevic said that the Serbian Government, upon a proposal of the General Staff which submitted to the Ministry of Defense, is considering the reinstatement of the military conscription in the country. ([www.rs.n1info.com](http://www.rs.n1info.com))

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, the Serbian Progressive Party's (Srpska Napredna Stranka – SNS) leader, Milos Vucevic said that the Serbian Parliament will

most likely be constituted in February, after the Republic Election Commission (RIK) will announce the official results of the elections. According to Vučević, SNS will invite the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (Savez Vojvodanskih Mađara – SVM) and most probably also the Bosniak parties and Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička Partija Srbije - SPS) to join the new Government. ([www.rs.n1info.com](http://www.rs.n1info.com))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Political turbulence followed the parliamentary elections of December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023, since the main opposition coalition accused the ruling SNS for electoral fraud. Opposition protests every day since December 17<sup>th</sup>, but the President Aleksandar Vučić rejected any idea for international mediation or annulment of the electoral results. SNS remains the absolute dominant in Serbian politics and fully controls situation. Vučić openly said that foreign factors interfered in Serbian elections seeking to destabilize the country, but he avoided to provide more details. Kosovo issue remains as the main challenge for Serbia in 2024. Serbian decision to allow Kosovo license plates to enter Serbia (followed by a respective decision from Kosovo authorities) could be considered as a step towards de-escalation of tension between Belgrade and Pristina, but there are a lot of challenges ahead. Serbia maintains a special relation with Russia and this is considered as a threat for the US and EU interests in Southeastern Europe. Corruption, organized crime, public administration accountability, media freedom are the main internal challenges for the country. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are*

*the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia and China. Potential reinstatement of military conscription could trigger tension in the region.*



**SLOVENIA:** January 1<sup>st</sup>, Slovenia is formally assuming as of January 1st, 2024 its two-year stint as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council to take part in decision making about global peace and security until December 31st, 2025. ([www.sta.si](http://www.sta.si))

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister Robert Golob formally nominated Freedom Movement (Gibanje Svoboda – GS) MP Mateja Galusic for Agriculture Minister. ([www.sta.si](http://www.sta.si))

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, the Slovenian Judicial Association decided to escalate its protests due to the unfulfilled decision of the Constitutional Court by the Government to increase judges' wages. Justice Minister Dominika Svarc Pipan said the decision would be implemented, albeit with a delay. She invited judges to dialogue and said her potential resignation would not bring the matter any closer to a solution. ([www.sta.si](http://www.sta.si))



The Slovenian Justice Minister, Dominika Svarc Pipan

(Photo source: [www.gov.si](http://www.gov.si))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*The center-left Government of Robert Golob suffers from public discontent which is expressed by protests and strikes. Current judicial turbulence highlights the social unrest and the failure of the ruling coalition to forward its reform plan and deal with the social problems. Although the ruling coalition appears stable it cannot be said the same for the state's political landscape. European energy crisis and high rates of inflation exercise pressure on social stability and state's economic performances.*



**TURKEY:** January 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Hakan Fidan stressed that the fight against PKK in Northern Iraq is in full cooperation and alignment with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil. Following the attack on Turkish soldiers in December, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) stepped up their retaliation operations against the PKK in both northern Syria and northern Iraq. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, the US Secretary of State paid a visit in Turkiye where he met with his counterpart, Hakan Fidan. Ankara expects from the US to approve the sale of 40 F-16 Block 70 fighter jets and the modernization of 80 older F-16 to the Block 70 version. However, the US have tied the sale to Turkiye's approval of the NATO membership for Sweden and raised alarm over Turkiye's past standoffs with Greece. Moreover, the two men discussed about war in Gaza, war in Ukraine, the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the situation in Syria and Iraq. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 7<sup>th</sup>, the Seawolf-1/2024 naval drill started Sunday in seas around Turkiye. The drill, which will end on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024, covers the Black Sea, Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. According to the Turkish Navy, approximately 17,000 personnel, 110 surface ships, seven submarines, 34 aircraft, 22 helicopters and 22 unmanned aerial vehicles are planned to participate. (www.dailysabah.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*Turkiye enjoys political stability in the context that the President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his party – AKP – fully control the internal political landscape. The coming local elections, scheduled for March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024 will be a strong test, but it will not bring dramatic changes in state politics. Economy remains as the main vulnerability of Tyrkiye. Extremely high inflation and weakness of Turkish Lira increase population's poverty and social instability. The last visit of the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken in Turkiye was of great importance for the future of Turkish – US relations. The critical point is the ratification of the entrance of Sweden in NATO by the National Assembly; it will signify a warming up of the bilateral relations between the two countries. Turkiye promotes an independent foreign policy as a regional power, despite the problems it faces with the EU and the US. It maintains a hardline stance regarding the Gaza conflict, without hesitating to use hard rhetoric against Israel. In short, Turkiye is behaving as a regional power, exercising a multilateral foreign policy. The main characteristics of this policy could be considered skillful adaptation and flexibility. In the Ukrainian front, Turkey has achieved to become a privileged interlocutor of both sides, upgrading*


*its role into a useful mediator. Apart from that, the need for the European energy diversification from Russia, has upgraded the Turkish role as a potential energy hub. In short, the Russian invasion in Ukraine could bring fundamental changes in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. In this context, Turkey seeks to restore relations with Egypt, UAE and Saudi Arabia. Needless to say that PKK is a serious threat against the Turkish national security long time ago and its elimination is of critical importance for Ankara.*


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#### **NOTE**

 *Stable situation. No security risk.*

 *Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.*

 *Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions. Low tension incidents.*

 *Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. Violent incidents or armed violence in specific regions. Ongoing tension or crisis. High security risk.*

 *Evolving or ongoing crisis including major armed violence or violent/armed conflict. Civil, inter-state or non –state actors war.*