



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

“SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE” 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, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. However Greece enjoys its own weekly review for a more detailed presentation of its current affairs (GREECE AT A GLANCE).

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.

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ALBANIA: November 22nd, Albanian Police said 12 Police Officers and three protesters were injured after protesters threw fireworks while protesting near the Parliament against the demolition without compensation of several dozen homes and businesses on the edge of Tirana. The Government plans to clear the area to enlarge a stretch of the Tirana ring road, and had offered below-market compensation for those with ownership deeds and two years' rent for the rest. About 300 families affected by the Government's policy have protested daily by blocking roads. The protest moved to the Parliament, while Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë - PSSh) MPs were summoned to a plenary session inside. They were protesting especially against Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj, who mocked the protesters as "cave dwellers" in a speech last week. Seeking to clarify his statement, Veliaj said later that he was referring to several opposition MPs seen among the protesters and not to local people in general. However, hundreds of them hurled slogans like "We are not cave dwellers" while protesting at the Parliament. Police said about 11 of them were arrested following the violence. The Prime Minister Edi Rama later visited wounded Police Officers at Tirana Military Hospital and said violence would not be tolerated. Earlier, he attacked protesters as abusers, accusing some of owning several illegal buildings in several places. Meanwhile, the opposition Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë - PDSH) and Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI) have accused the highway development of corruption, citing the unusually high costs of the works. The 2.3 km-long highway is expected to cost about 40 million euro, which is about 17

million euro per kilometer. The Government claims the procurement was based on the law and says the cost is high because works include several underpasses and overpasses. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- November 22nd, "The budget confirms Albania's effort to fulfill its international obligations, especially as regards NATO. The 100% alignment of our foreign policy to the EU is a matter of strategic choice. The Albanian citizens made this choice from the moment we left the communist regime. This was followed by our contribution to the European security. We have done this not only through NATO but also through our ambition to lead organizations in which we have only been part of, so far, with the hope to give something in return as a contribution," the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ditmir Bushati said. Ambition of Albania is to lead the OSCE in 2020, and the budget of 2019 reflects this aspiration. The regular meetings with Kosovo, F.Y.R.O.M, and Montenegro were held to make detailed projects of cooperation, which have a direct impact on common citizens. "We will continue in 2019 with this practice, to deepen our position, to display more the constructive role of Albania in the region, translating it in joint projects with our neighbors, such as the progress of the rights of Albanians in the region," Bushati added. The Minister said that digitalization of consulate services has produced great results. "This process will continue in 2019, supported by the budget," he said. (www.top-channel.tv)

- November 23rd, The Head of the Parliamentary Group of Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë - PSSh) Taulant Balla received in a meeting the Regional Director of central and Eastern Europe of the American

Democratic Institute (ADI) Robert Benjamin. Main topic of their talks was the electoral reform and prospects of this reform to approach the European standards. Balla claimed that the electoral reform is a top priority and challenge for the Government. *"Today, I was pleased to meet with the Director of central and Eastern Europe of the American Democratic Institute Robert Benjamin. I am quite optimistic that collaborators such as ADI are supportive of important reforms such as the electoral one. I express my appreciation for the contribution and active involvement of ADI in such important and democratic processes in the country,"* Balla said. He added that electoral reform will focus on political parties' transparent funding, electoral code, and electronic vote, while about 200 projects are expected to be implemented soon. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Opposition accuses the Government of having links with organized crime. Opposition raises questions over the power of "Albanian mafia" in the country and its influence in state's politics. Undoubtedly, corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state's problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU next year. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Latest protests and violent reaction of Police forces strengthens opposition effort of undermining governmental stability and cohesion. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a "mother nation". It is estimated that Albania will fully comply with the EU and U.S "line" for territorial exchanges or border changes between Serbia and Kosovo if it is necessary for a mutual

accepted solution. Albania maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and F.Y.R.O.M. Possible border changes may engage Albania in dangerous situations taking into consideration that it has the role of "protector" of Albanians in the region. Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

November 21st, the newly elected Bosnian Serb member of the tripartite Presidency Milorad Dodik called on all Serbs working in Bosnia's state institutions to resign, announcing an overhaul in the country's intelligence service and declared that Serbia is his real homeland while Bosnia is just where he works. The pro-Russian leader has for years been advocating the secession of the semi-autonomous Serb-dominated half of Bosnia, Republika Srpska (RS), and its annexation to neighboring Serbia. He has frequently criticized Bosnian Serbs who work for Bosnia's state institutions and called them "traitors". A day after of his inauguration to the state Presidency, he declared he will be working for the interests of RS and announced that he distrusts current Serb officials in state institutions, who are predominantly people chosen by his political opponents. *"I call upon them to resign. Some of them, maybe, can stay, we will see. And for those who don't do it, we will find ways to remove them from office,"* he said, adding that this will not be an act of vengeance, but that those people first need to prove that they want to cooperate with him. Dodik further stated that RS has the right to defend its constitutional framework, and this will be done by a new institution that he said will be established, the

“Council for the Protection of the RS Constitutional Framework.” He criticized the work of Bosnia’s Intelligence Agency (OSA), saying that it has been working against RS and announced a law that would change *“many things”* regarding this institution. Dodik did not elaborate further but announced that *“measures will be implemented against anyone who is breaching the (RS) constitutional framework,”* adding that RS has the right to monitor anyone who is working against its constitution. According to him, although he is a member of Bosnia’s Presidency, he will travel using a Serbian passport. *“I have no reason to change anything, I am a Serb. I love Serbia more than I love Bosnia. Bosnia is only my place of employment,”* he said. Earlier that day, Dodik called Bosnia as a *“failed experiment.”* *“We (the Serbs) are forced to be in Bosnia and Herzegovina by an international agreement, which has been breached by the international community. There are nearly no reasons that should keep us within Bosnia,”* he said. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- November 21st, Head of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Government Denis Zvizdic said he would respond to Pristina's decision to impose 100% customs duties for the products originating from Bosnia. Such decision is unnecessary and must be withdrawn, Zvizdic said, adding, *“Dialogue, talks and respect of international standards is the right path.”* After Kosovo imposed 10% customs tariffs for the products imported by Bosnia and Serbia at the beginning of November, Kosovo authorities introduced 100 % duties, saying that such a decision was received for protection of state’s economy. According to Zvizdic, this decision is directly opposite to the postulates and goals of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), an

agreement stipulating zero-tariff trade across the region. *“If that was an answer to the result of vote on (Kosovo's) membership in the Interpol, I think Kosovo picked a wrong method and way, sending a wrong message,”* Zvizdic said. Speaking in the Vienna meeting that Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz organized for the Western Balkans Ministers and European Commissioners Johannes Hahn and Mariya Gabriel, Zvizdic said he is glad the Western Balkans remains in the EU's focus and that the European perspectives of the region are still alive. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- November 22nd, according to the the Croatian member of the European Parliament Zeljana Zovko, Turkey had used its influence to affect the general election in Bosnia and Bosnia's Islamic Community. The European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs held a session, where it was discussed the post-election situation in Bosnia and amendments to the EU Parliament’s annual report on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Zeljana Zovko spoke for the Croat candidate Zeljko Komsic who won over his biggest rival and leader of the nationalist Croat Democratic Union (HDZ BiH) Dragan Covic. She said there were alleged controversies in the election process which were never mentioned before. According to her, after the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held an election rally in Bosnia, earlier this year, Turkey used its influence to affect the general election and that the Islamic Community in Bosnia suggested to Bosniaks to vote for Zeljko Komsic, thus securing his victory over the outnumbered Croat representative, Dragan Covic. Adviser to the Head of Bosnia’s Islamic Community, Muhamed Jusic said he rejects such claims as an attempt of a malicious campaign against the Islamic Community. *“This is just a continuation of a malicious campaign against the*

Islamic Community led by some political centers from Croatia, but also from Bosnia. They keep accusing us without any evidence of their claims,” Jusic said. He added that such statements only hinder the reconciliation process and have far-reaching consequences. In his opinion, the ultimate goal of such statements is to damage the interreligious relations in Bosnia and to transfer the conflict from political elites to the society in Bosnia. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. It is under question if the general election held on October 7th, 2018 will bring political stability in the country. It is estimated that formation of Government would be a very difficult issue adding more problems in state's function. Croats strengthens their rhetoric for a third entity in the country; the Croatian entity. Election of ultra nationalist Serb Milorad Dodik in the tripartite Presidency is a strong sign of more nationalistic rhetoric and more obstacles towards Bosnia's EU and NATO integration. Dodik is a person who does not actually believe in B&H viability and is expected to promote (actually, he already has started) his own political agenda. Bosnia has become a field of influence's rivalry; Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Russia approach the country mainly through “investments” and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests. High Representative Inzko expressed in the UN Security Council his disappointment and pessimism over Bosnia's future. Major concerns over security situation and political stability in the state.



BULGARIA: November 19th, the Parliamentary leader of ruling Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) party, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, said in an interview, that resignation of Deputy Prime Minister Valeri Simeonov was not surprising. He added that there were no changes in the coalition agreement between GERB and its smaller partner - the United Patriots, and that no early elections should be expected. The Government will continue to fulfill its commitments to mothers of children with disabilities and stands entirely behind their demands. The United Patriot Co-Chair, Krassimir Karakachanov, said that Valeri Simeonov would return to the Parliament as a MP. (www.novinite.com)

- November 21st, after four hours of stormy exchanges, Bulgaria's National Assembly voted to approve the resignation of United Patriots co-leader Valeri Simeonov as Deputy Prime Minister and his replacement by Mariana Nikolova, up to now his Chief of Staff. Of those present of Bulgaria's 240 MPs, the vote was 116 in favor and 62 against. The vote in Parliament came after Simeonov announced his resignation on November 16th, 2018 a month to the day after making offensive comments about mothers of children with disabilities, which led to protests demanding his resignation as Deputy PM. The vote came a day after the partners of ruling coalition spent more than six hours in talks about how to proceed in the wake of Simeonov's resignation. Nomination of Nikolova, who as Deputy Head of Government takes the economic and demographic policy portfolio, led opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP) MP Dragomir

Stoynev to say that *“Simeonov goes away, but he remains. A substitute comes in his place.”* (www.sofiaglobe.com)



New Deputy Prime Minister, Mariana Nikolova
(Photo source: www.gov.bg)

- November 21st, at an organized meeting, Lockheed Martin made once again a presentation of the proposed to the Bulgarian Government F-16 fighter aircraft. The meeting was organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria and short presentations to the media and part of the Bulgarian military manufacturers were made by the Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce Petar Ivanov, the U.S. Ambassador to Bulgaria Eric Rubin and the International Business Development Director for the F-16 Program at Lockheed Martin James Robinson. The U.S. Ambassador Eric Rubin stressed that the U.S. takes seriously the commitments, made to assist the military modernization of its partners, including Bulgaria, and added that *“The Bulgarian purchase of new F-16 fighters will support not only Bulgaria’s security but also the regional and collective security of NATO Allies.”* Erik Rubin, who was

asked later by journalists, shared that there is a chance that if Bulgaria chooses F-16, it will play an essential role in its maintenance for the region, and he added that the deal does not only include a purchase of equipment, but also trainings for the whole spectrum of military personnel, not only for the pilots. The proposed package will help aircraft to be operated properly and longer. In turn, the Director for the F-16 Program at Lockheed Martin James Robinson hinted that it was difficult to be met the 24-month deadline set in the plan of the Bulgarian Government for the delivery of the first batch of fighters. *“We are worried about the delayed procedures, but I am optimistic and, as far as we know, we are working to meet the set timeframe. I cannot comment on the prices, at the moment, because it is a process of commercial talks,”* Robinson said. (www.bulgarianmilitary.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Nomination of Mariana Nikolova as the new Deputy Prime Minister ended the inter-governmental crisis followed by Valeri Simeonov’s resignation. However, none could predict when a new incident or dispute of the small partner of the ruling coalition, United Patriots will break out. Bulgaria has entered in a period of fragile political stability. Public dissatisfaction due to high fuel price strengthens this atmosphere of uncertainty. On the other hand, President Radev grabs every opportunity to criticize the Government (and the Prime Minister Borissov) highlighting his different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Opposition BSP tries to push further Borisov and his Government by strengthening its rhetoric and having tabled three motions of no confidence so far. The country strengthened its

efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Although modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc) military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: November 19th, Croatian Foreign Minister Marija Pejcinovic-Buric said at a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Brussels that Croatia is concerned about the status of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their legal representation in the Government. At Croatia's request, the Foreign Ministers of the EU member states discussed the situation in Bosnia after the October 7th, 2018 general elections, in which the Democratic Front's (Demokratska Fronta - DF) candidate Zeljko Komsic was elected the Bosnian Croat member of the country's tripartite Presidency. In the past few weeks, Croatia has embarked on a diplomatic campaign claiming that Zeljko Komsic was elected as the Croat member of the Bosnia's Presidency with Bosniak votes. All the major Croat parties in Bosnia claim that it was Dragan Covic, leader of the nationalist Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH) sister-party of the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica - HDZ) the ruling party in Croatia, who had won the most Croat votes. *"The conclusion is that everyone agrees that Bosnia's European journey is very important. More and more member states understand Croatia's*

concern about the status of Croats, one of the three constituent peoples. We expect further discussion in the near future," Pejcinovic-Buric said. Pejcinovic-Buric said some EU member states were pushing for resolving all the issues in Bosnia at once, through reforms required for EU membership, while others, including Croatia, were in favor a gradual approach. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini told reporters after the meeting the Foreign Affairs Council would discuss Bosnia again in December. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- November 21st, *"Europe has no unified response to the challenge of migration. This is why it is necessary to be better connected in terms of security and borders safety, as a prerequisite for economic development,"* said President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović in Zadar. The President visited Zadar and its Arbanasi village together with the Albanian President Ilir Meta, who was on a working visit to Croatia. Arbanasi is a village where Albanians who migrated to the Zadar area in the 18th century live there. *"Although they preserved their identity, the name Arbanasi quickly became a synonym for uncompromising loyalty to the Croatian homeland and the Catholic faith, which often exposed them to social marginalization and persecution, especially during the times of fascist and communist rule in Croatia,"* said the President in her address. She emphasized that they also gave a great contribution in creating and defending Croatia. *"Relations between Croatia and Albania are strong and close today,"* said the President adding that as members of NATO they participate in the building of security in Southeast Europe, which is today facing new challenges. She underlined that Croatia will continue to provide support for Albania as a candidate country for accession to

the EU, because this is the best path for the security of South East Europe, to continue to advance economic cooperation and mutually protect the Adriatic from pollution. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- November 23rd, the Conflict of Interest Commission has decided to not initiate procedures against the Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic for a conflict of interest over employing his cousin at the Croatian Tourism Office in Munich, because he had no say in the selection of personnel of the office. A case will also not be opened regarding the employment of the Prime Minister's uncle at the Biokovo Nature Park. Instead a case against Minister Tomislav Coric has been opened, since it was he who decided on the appointment, without giving any reason. However, the appointment of the Prime Minister's best man, Igor Pokaz, who was appointed as the Ambassador to the United Kingdom, will be investigated. The Commission believes that the Prime Minister should have informed the public and the bodies involved in the appointment process. Although, Pokaz is a career diplomat who has served in Moscow, Brussels, and New York, the Commission said the close connection to the Prime Minister should have been disclosed before he was confirmed. *"I propose that in this case a procedure against the Prime Minister Plenkovic be opened for having avoided informing the public about his activities as the Prime Minister. While on the other hand, he consciously avoided informing the responsible bodies about his relationship with those people,"* said Davorin Ivanjek, a member of the Conflict of Interest Commission. The Prime Minister said that he would not resign from the role for which he was democratically elected and subsequently confirmed by the Croatian Parliament. On the

other hand, he said there were many similar cases like this one. And if that is how the law is going to be interpreted, then he should be excluded of all nominations in the diplomatic services. *"I think the Committee should continue to work according to the law. But we must also look at the purpose of the Commission. This is an example of how you have a case filed by a political opponent, which is absolutely banal. To open a procedure for this case is nonsense,"* said the Prime Minister. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Croatia follows a tough external policy with neighboring countries. Although it has territorial disputes with Slovenia and Bosnia it does not hesitate to intervene in Bosnia's internal affairs in the name of Croatian entity living there. It is more than obvious that Croatia tries to establish a leading role in Western Balkans not only as an EU and NATO member state but also as a rising "local" power. One should take into consideration that Croatia shows its military strength and capabilities quite often not only in international, but also in national level sending strong messages to neighboring countries. Although the President is a member of the ruling party, it is estimated that there is some kind of political distance between the President and Government. However, ruling coalition claims political stability. Border dispute on Piran Bay remains active and Slovenia's initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. It is still a question how Croatia will react. Apart from that a new border conflict has emerged with Bosnia & Herzegovina regarding Peljesak Bridge. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone. Croatia implements a policy of

Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: November 19th, the Foreign Ministry made representations to the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) over last week's reported harassment of Greek Cypriot farmers in the buffer zone near Deneia village, when they were prevented by the Turkish army from cultivating their land. Community leader of Deneia, Christakis Panayiotou, said that the farmers decided not to go to their land to avoid escalating tension, but from Tuesday they plan to return to the fields in the buffer zone they have been leasing and cultivating for the past five years. According to the Foreign Ministry's Spokesman, Demetris Samuel, there had been three incidents last week in the Deneia area. *"We promptly made representations to the UNFICYP, reporting the illegal actions of the occupation army, the harassment of the farmers and asking for their immediate intervention for the restoration of their rights and the protection of their safety,"* Samuel said. He added that efforts are underway for everything to run smoothly during the farmers' return to the fields on Tuesday. Citing UNFICYP data, Samuel said that the peace keeping force over the past few years had been called to respond to more than 1,000 similar incidences in the buffer zone per year. Panayiotou said that, on several occasions over the last week, farmers who own or lease land in the buffer zone have been asked to leave by Turkish soldiers. He said that the soldiers are followed on to the land by farmers from the north who started to work the land. According to authorities in the north, there was no tension between the Turkish military and Greek Cypriot

farmers and the Deneia incident was just news propaganda. According to media reports in the north, the 'foreign ministry' said it had contacted the Turkish military that said that no such incidents had occurred. It also said that the Greek Cypriot side has tried to force UNFICYP to confirm the incident but had failed. UNFICYP Spokesman, Aleem Siddique, told the Cyprus News Agency that he had no information concerning the community's claims and could therefore not confirm them. He said that a Greek Cypriot farmer entered the buffer zone in the Deneia area on Saturday morning without the necessary permission, but left after UNFICYP staff asked him to leave. He reiterated that actions that undermine the military status quo cannot be allowed, adding that maintaining the status quo and ensuring the safety of civilians within the buffer zone remains the most important priority of the peacekeeping force. Deneia was a mixed village with a total of 128 Turkish Cypriots and 170 Greek Cypriots prior to the intercommunal troubles in the 1960s. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- November 19th, the President Nicos Anastasiades said having NATO guaranteeing the island's reunification is not out of the question. Asked whether any thought had been put in NATO guaranteeing a solution of the Cyprus problem, the President said there are many parties who could do that. *"... there is the UN, the EU, there are many ways to safeguard the Republic of Cyprus,"* he said, as long as the conditions to resume the talks were created first. Asked if NATO is off the table, Anastasiades said *"I haven't excluded anything from the discussion."* Reunification talks in Switzerland in the summer 2017 collapsed ostensibly over the Turkish side's insistence in preserving Turkey's role as a guarantor power and keeping an army on the

island post-solution. However, getting NATO involved as an organization would probably be opposed by Russia and main opposition AKEL. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- November 21st, the United States recognizes the right of Cyprus to develop the resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), a State Department spokesperson said. Following the launch of an exploratory drilling by US energy giant Exxon Mobil in plot 10 of Cyprus' EEZ, last Friday, a Turkish seismographic research vessel has entered plot 4, accompanied by Turkish warships. *"The US policy on Cyprus's EEZ is longstanding and has not changed: The United States recognizes the right of the Republic of Cyprus to develop the resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone,"* a Spokesperson of the State Department reiterated, replying to a question. *"We continue to believe the island's oil and gas resources, like all of its resources, should be equitably shared between both communities in the context of an overall settlement,"* he told reporters and noted that *"we discourage any actions or rhetoric that increases tensions in the region."* (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus expresses in highest level its commitment to continue its energy plans exploiting energy resources in Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) despite Turkish aggression. Involvement of an American company (ExxonMobil) in the drills it is proved "wise" and "smart". The US administration expresses its support in Cypriot energy plans through visits of high officials and statements. Announcement of Turkish seismographic research within the Cypriot EEZ (plot 4) could be assessed as spasmodic actions of

Turkey against Cyprus (already predicted and expected). At the moment, none could assess the level of escalation Turkey seeks to reach. Taking into consideration that Cyprus lacks of military power and especially aeronautical forces it is expected Greece to be engaged more actively in the region. Conduct of aeronautical exercises in cooperation with other countries sends various messages of defense capability, readiness, and determination. The UN Secretary General appears optimistic for a new round of talks between the two communities. President Anastasiades promotes the scenario of a "bizonal, bicomunal decentralized federation"; an idea which is in principle accepted by the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community and enjoys support from the U.S. However, there are a lot of disputed issues in which both parts should compromise; the most important is considered the decision-making process. The idea of NATO as the guarantor of Cyprus reunification and security is a new fact which may cause disputes within the Cypriot political life. 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.



F.Y.R.O.M: November 20th, Former Prime Minister and 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), Nikola Gruevski, who was sentenced to two years in prison in the State Prosecutor's Office (SPO) "Tank" case, has confirmed on social media that he has been granted asylum in

Hungary. *“Today, the Republic of Hungary, an EU and NATO member country, responded positively to my previously submitted request for political asylum due to political persecution in the Republic of Macedonia [F.Y.R.O.M]. In my request for political asylum, I stated that I am claiming asylum because of political persecution by the new Government led by the SDSM party. I stated that the Government wants to deprive me of my freedom by using undemocratic steps and methods and abusing the judicial system as well as the prosecution system in Macedonia [F.Y.R.O.M],”* Gruevski wrote on social media. (www.meta.mk)

- November 20th, F.Y.R.O.M’s former Chief of the secret Police, Saso Mijalkov, who is currently on trial in several high-profile court cases, was detained and given a 30-day detention, the Skopje Criminal Court confirmed. The Court said that it had issued the order on the request of the Special Prosecution in charge of investigating high-level crime, the SJO, which cited the danger of him fleeing the country. The SJO confirmed that Mijalkov is detained in relation to the ongoing trial codenamed “Target-Fortress”. In this case, which is regarded as one of the most important and cumbersome that the SJO has ever opened, Mijalkov along with other Police officials are accused of illegally wiretapping hundreds of citizens and of later trying to destroy the evidence. Mijalkov is also currently on trial in several other SJO cases that deal with alleged election rigging, financial crimes and alleged torture during an arrest of a political opponent. The former secret Police Chief’s arrest took place just one week after the former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, fled the country before serving his two-year jail term for an illicit purchase of a luxury limousine. During the right-wing Internal

Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) time in power, from 2006-2017, Gruevski and Mijalkov were widely accused of being the masterminds behind establishing an authoritarian rule and of harboring corruption. They were also accused of being the alleged masterminds behind the massive illegal wiretapping scandal that rocked the country in 2015 and eventually led to VMRO DPMNE’s ousting. They have both denied any wrongdoings, insisting that the court cases and investigations against them were politically motivated. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- November 23rd, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the key state body for the prevention of corruption and conflict of interests, has not been working for seven and a half months, since last March when the President, Igor Tanturovski resigned, and from April 2nd, 2018 members were “sent” on vacation indefinitely. The Parliamentary Committee on Political System and Inter-Community Relations held a public debate today on the draft law on the prevention of corruption and conflict of interest, which should set a new model for the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption. According to Oliver Ristovski, the Deputy Minister of Justice, the new composition of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption will have 7 members, who will be professionals and will be elected in a transparent procedure. Candidates for Commission members must not have been MPs, members of the Government, donors of a political party, or have held office in political party bodies in the last ten years. Slagjana Taseva from

Transparency International estimates that the new law is a step forward in the fight against corruption and seeks the support from MPs so the Commission can become an independent body for the control and prevention of corruption. The new law should devise a new model for the functioning of the commission, which has not worked in the last few years and were serious failures. According to Justice Minister Renata Trenevskia Desskoska, the new law strengthens the ability of the commission and will also enable it to check the bank accounts and property of officials. (www.meta.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Prime Minister Zaev accelerates procedures for constitutional amendments aiming at concluding the whole process successfully. It is expected late January 2019 the whole process will have been finished successfully. Not only F.Y.R.O.M's future is based on this process, but also Zaev's political future. It is more than certain that constitutional change will end successfully not only because Zaev fully controls political balance in the Parliament, but also because international community namely the US and EU strongly supports F.Y.R.O.M's name change. F.Y.R.O.M has become a field of rivalry between the US and EU on the one side and Russia on the other. After Montenegro, NATO seeks to bring F.Y.R.O.M within the alliance isolating Russian influence in the region. Needless to say that in a period where border questions are raised again in the Balkans, F.Y.R.O.M needs political stability and growth prospects.



GREECE: November 19th, more than 42,000 refugees sought asylum in Greece last year, according to the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion, ESPON, which statistics showed that a total of 204,718 refugees arrived in the EU in 2017. According to the network, 42,305 refugees applied for asylum in Greece after crossing from Turkey in 2017. Meanwhile, a total of 118,962 people traveled from Libya to Italy, according to the network's data. The peak crisis year of 2015 saw 1.3 million asylum applications lodged across the 28 member states, chiefly from nationals of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Number of applications was drastically reduced in the spring of 2016 after Turkey signed an agreement with the EU to crack down on human smuggling across the Aegean. Greece and Italy remain the first port of call for most refugees while Austria and Germany are among the most popular destinations. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- November 21st, the strategic dialogue between Greece and the US to take place in Washington on December 13th, 2018 is seen as the culmination of two years of deepening ties. According to Kathimerini daily the US is backing on the developing relationship as a source of stability in the region. According to reports, Athens is preparing for talks that will center on five pillars of cooperation set by Washington – defense and security, trade and investments, anti-terrorism policies, energy and the ways in which Greece and the US can contribute to stability in the area stretching from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Balkans and the wider Black Sea region. The F.Y.R.O.M name deal also boosted relations, having reportedly shown that Greece is willing to take difficult decisions in the interests of the

region. The Government's extradition of two Russian diplomats last summer was also viewed favorably in Washington, which seeks to participate in the trilateral alliance of Greece, Israel and Cyprus. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- November 23rd, a joint military exercise by Greece, Egypt and Cyprus, dubbed “*Medusa 7-Alexandroupoli 18*” is scheduled to get under way on November 23rd to 30th, 2018. According to the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (GEETHA), the land, air and sea exercise on and around the island of Crete will be observed by military representatives from the United Arab Emirates, the US, Italy, Morocco and Portugal. The exercise includes phases of activities conducted ashore-Souda Naval Base and at sea-Cretan Sea. The Hellenic Armed Forces will participate with 3 frigates (FFG), 1 submarine (SUB), 2 Fast Patrol Boats (FPB), 1 Landing Ship (LST), 8 F-16 fighter jets, 1 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), 1 SUPER PUMA helicopter, 3 CHINOOK helicopters, 4 AH-64 Attack helicopters and Special Forces (SOF) personnel. Cypriot Armed Forces will participate with 1 Patrol Boat and SOF personnel. Egyptian Armed Forces will participate with 1 Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD), 1 FFG, 1 SUB, 2 FPB, 6 F-16 fighter jets, 1 E2-C (AWAKS) and SOF personnel. The purpose of the exercise is to further advance cooperation of the Armed Forces in a multi-threat environment. The main training objectives include improvement of the interoperability at the tactical level, surface, anti-submarine and anti-air warfare exercises, air units' training against surface targets, amphibious operations, asymmetric threats, Asymmetric threats, Search and Rescue (SAR) and Maritime Interdiction (MIO) Operations, and Gunfire drills. (www.geetha.mil.gr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling coalition of SYRIZA – ANEL intensifies its efforts to reverse political atmosphere since the country enters gradually in a long pre-electoral period. Tsipras and Kammenos try to gain political time planning to relief society with social care measures. Taking into consideration that measures will start to be voted next month it is assessed that early election may be called in May 2019 together with local and European election. Ruling coalition believes that it is enough time so people to enjoy relief measures reversing political climate. Of course there is always the alternative scenario of parliamentary election in autumn 2019 when actually mandate of current Government expires. The ruling coalition tries to put in the political agenda issues which will turn the interest of public opinion from daily life and governmental failures. Constitutional reform is a typical example, while the prime Minister's initiative to seek an agreement with the Church separating it from the state may have controversial results. One should take into consideration that Greek Church is extremely powerful with high influence in Greek society. Greece (and Cyprus) has entered in a risky period of tension with Turkey. Several Turkish NAVTEX in the Aegean Sea for aeronautical exercises included fires establish conditions of tension and possible crisis. Coming days will be critical to see if Turkey keeps maintaining a war of words or it will escalate situation.



KOSOVO: November 19th, the package of laws on transition of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into an Army of Kosovo have been approved by Parliament in the first reading, but despite announcements that the

legislation package on the army would be finalized on November 28th, 2018, members of the Parliament's Committee on KSF stated that there will be no establishment of the Army on this date. November 28th is celebrated by Albanians as the Flag and Independence Day of Albania. Members of the Parliament's Committee asked Kosovo politicians to be united so that the Kosovo army would be established as soon as possible. Haxhi Shala, Chairman of the Committee on oversight of the KSF, said that the draft laws will not be adopted on November 28th, 2018, as it was reported by some media and propagated by Belgrade officials linking creation of the Army with the Independence Day of Albania. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- November 20th, Kosovo failed to secure the necessary support of two-thirds of Interpol's 192 member states in its bid to join the International Criminal Police Organization at its general assembly in Dubai. According to Serbian national broadcaster RTS, of the countries that cast their votes, 51 were against Kosovo's membership, 68 were in favor, and 16 abstained. Kosovo needed to secure 115 votes to join. Kosovo's Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj, expressed "*deep disappointment*" on social media over Pristina's failed Interpol bid and accused Serbia of fighting a "*vicious campaign*" against Kosovo's membership. The President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, called the result of the vote "*unjust*", but maintained that Belgrade and Pristina should reach a final agreement on the normalization of relations. "*The agreement on normalization ... means quick EU accession, otherwise both countries will pay*," Thaci told media in Dubai. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic called on Pristina to understand that "*the solution is in reaching an agreement with Belgrade, and not in*

having someone imposing solutions on Serbia." "*It would be good if Albanian politicians would send that message to their people*," Vucic told media in Belgrade. Interpol, the international network that links police forces across 192 countries, acts as a platform for cooperation and information-sharing for cross-border crimes. Membership would have given Kosovo access to a common international database of criminal evidence available for all member countries to access. Kosovo has unsuccessfully applied for Interpol membership in 2015 and 2016, while last year it withdrew its previous application ahead of the general assembly meeting in China, a country that has opposed Kosovo's statehood and membership of international organizations since Pristina declared independence in 2008. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- November 23rd, Chief of Staff of the Kosovo Prime Minister's Office, Avni Arifi, said that the decision for imposing 100% tax on all Serbia's goods will not be revoked until full normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Arifi said the Government is firm in its decision on imposing a 100% tax in all goods coming from Serbia. He said the Government's decision taken on November 22nd, 2018 was not easy and will not be removed within days or months. "*The Government is firm. The stance of Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj is not to remove the tax within days, weeks or months. Our stance is that the tariffs will not be removed until reaching full normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia*," Arifi said. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo's failure in entering INTERPOL due to an aggressive campaign of Serbia was a hard slap

for the state. However, it has sent a clear message that state's unilateral acts will not bring Kosovo closer to the international community and normality. It is more than obvious that the state has reached a critical point where only through normalization of relations with Serbia it will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. Imposing 100% tariff on Serbian (and Bosnian products) is just a spasmodic action escalating tension. Kosovo army is another example of unilateral action in a period where mutual confidence should have been built. It should be underlined that at the moment Kosovo's political power are divided regarding negotiation process and goals. The Prime Minister Haradinaj and the Government are not in harmony with the President Thaci who is the chief negotiator of the state (or at least he decided that he is). There is even a matter of legitimacy within the state regarding who is authorized to represent the country in dialogue with Serbia. The question of border exchange or simply change continues to divide Kosovo political forces and population. However, it could be estimated that if Kosovo keeps on acting in such way it may be isolated on the table of international negotiations. It seems that the U.S (and the EU) has a leading role in the background pushing for the idea of territorial change (or exchange). Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. A mutual accepted agreement between Kosovo and Serbia is the critical point for the country in order to start approaching the Euro-Atlantic integration. Kosovo army issue is a case which may cause tension with Serbia and it seems that the state

seeks to accelerate actions towards transformation of KSF into a regular army.



MOLDOVA: November 19th, reunification of Bessarabia with Romania is a “realistic” and “doable” process that has “begun” by the action of regaining Romanian citizenship by one million Moldovans, declared the president of the People's Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP), Eugen Tomac. “If we had a more brave political class, more responsible and a more developed patriotism, maybe the unification process would have already happened,” he said. Tomac reminded the initiative of former President Traian Basescu in 2009; the process of regaining Romanian citizenship was unblocked and that at present, out of almost 3.5 million Moldovan citizens, one million have a Romanian passport, being citizens with regular acts of Romania. “So, Romania took the first step towards reunification. Of course, this process, after a long Soviet period of denationalization, could not happen quickly, especially since, at least in the last four years, Romania did not have a coherent policy of maintaining that trend of closeness which President Basescu has drawn. My conviction is that the process is irreversible,” Tomac said. He pointed out that more than 60 of the 101 deputies in the Parliament of Chisinau, “of all political colors” hold Romanian citizenship. The PMP leader believes that the topic of reunification should be taken, “with the arguments we have” to Brussels, and it will also be one of the messages that the party will promote in the campaign of the European Parliament. “It does not happen overnight, it will not be an easy process, there will be difficult negotiations, but I think we are currently gathering all the data for this to happen.

But everything depends on the vision that the Government of Bucharest must have, implicitly the President. Therefore it's realistic," he concluded. (www.moldova.org)

- November 22nd, Representatives of the Government of Bucharest and those of the Government of Chisinau have signed several cooperation agreements. In addition to those related to tourism, education, health, domestic affairs, economic cooperation, diaspora relations, etc., the Moldovan and Romanian dignitaries also signed an agreement on the elimination of roaming charges, a statement of intent between the two Ministries of Defense on the creation of an intensified training framework for the establishment of a joint unit between the Romanian Armed Forces and the Moldovan Army, and a protocol on the establishment of joint patrol teams at the common state border. The Moldovan Prime Minister Pavel Filip said that there is a tendency for the parties to assume the desideratum of the Union, while it would, in fact, have to happen through the interconnection of the infrastructure, not through strong statements. *"We have the same blood and we have to try, through concrete infrastructure projects, to build blood networks that the two capitals beat at the same pace,"* he said. Through the projects provided for in the new cooperation agreements, Filip declared that a possibility is examined of crossing the railways of Moldova to gauge similar to those in Romania. In the future, this will provide the opportunity to put on the line and a fast interstate racing train. (www.moldova.org)

- November 24th, if the next parliamentary elections are not free and fair, the Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS) will continue the protests. The statement

was made by the party leader, Maia Sandu, who said that if the parliamentary elections are not free, they will neither be recognized in Moldova, nor abroad. Meanwhile, Maia Sandu believes that if the next parliamentary elections are free and fair, then the bloc that the PAS has set up along with the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) cannot fail to win. The fact that the rules of play are not equal for all those who are candidates says a lot about the ruling political parties in the country as well as about the international community. The boycott of the next parliamentary elections means that the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM) dictated by Vladimir Plahotniuc will remain in power and there will be no need to falsify the election. (www.moldova.org)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political life is "hostage" of the pro-Russian President Igor Dodon and pro-Western Government rivalry which undermines the institutional function of the country. In the wider framework Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. Political situation in the country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which will strengthen state's transparency, accountability and democratic values. Coming parliamentary elections scheduled for February 24th, 2019 will be closely monitored by the international community and especially the US and EU as a "democratic stress test." The Government is sliding into dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime and deep and determined justice reforms

are needed. The U.S, EU and IMF express their major concerns. By autumn the state has entered in pre-election period although elections are scheduled for February 24th, 2019. One should keep an eye on current political (and public) trend on reunification with Romania. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: November 19th,

Montenegro has very ambitious plans for the period of Austrian Presidency of the EU, said the Prime Minister of Montenegro, Dusko Markovic in Vienna, after the meeting of the leaders of the Western Balkans with the Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and EU Commissionaires of European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn and Digital Economy and Society Mariya Gabriel. “We base our optimism on the most recent document of the EC referring to the rule of law, which indicates a balanced and, therefore, real picture of the efforts that Montenegro is constantly putting into the implementation of reforms within the negotiation process. I am sure that Austria and the EU countries will evaluate objectively our results,” the Prime Minister said. “What is important for us is that we heard the plans of Austria in the upcoming Presidency, but we also we presented ours,” Markovic said. Hahn confirmed that one of the EU priorities is enlargement of the Western Balkans. Gabriel said to the leaders of these countries that they can always count on the support of the EU and that the EU will keep investing in talented people of the region. Kurz said that Austria has three focus points when it comes to the Western Balkan countries. “Today we had the opportunity to focus on three

important topics – the region's EU journey, regional cooperation and resolving bilateral disputes. We realize that stability in Europe depends also on stability and security in the Western Balkans,” he said. Heads of Governments of all Western Balkan countries said that it’s very important that Austria insists on enlargement. (www.cdm.me)



The Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz with Western Balkan states leaders, and Comissioners Johannes Hahn and Mariya Gabriel
(Photo source: www.gov.me)

- November 21st, military analyst, Aleksandar Radic, said in the interview for “Pobjeda” that the new organization structure of the Armed Forces of Montenegro, determined by the Government, is the real need that has been emerged due to NATO membership. With the decision on voluntary military service, the space for “passive” reserve is open. “Once these people serve their military service, they become passive reserve,” Radic said. He added that military organization is not “sacred” and that it can be changed and adapted towards new situations whenever necessary. NATO accession has created new needs which impose changes from time to time. “Montenegro is trying to follow the trend of passive reserves and it is pointed out that it is the number of people to be called in case of need, artificial or natural disasters, to provide support for civil

institutions,” Radic said. Decision on the structure and the size of the Armed Forces of Montenegro defines that it consists of the General Staff, first and second Infantry Battalion, Mixed Artillery Division, Air Force of Montenegro, Navy of the Armed Forces of Montenegro, Fire Support Battalion, Support Battalion, Training Center, Military-Medical Center and Squad for Network and Electronic Warfare. The same decision stipulates that the transformation of the Montenegro Armed Forces’ current structure should be done in the forthcoming months. (www.cdm.me)

- November 21st, the Prime Minister Dusko Markovic expressed his satisfaction with the results of the Government in the last two years, on the occasion of the meeting of the Foreign Investors Council. *“That’s the effort, ours and of our numerous partners. Foreign Investors Council is one of them,”* said Markovic. He said that they put pressure on the administration to be more efficient and more responsible, in order to improve the performance and so that the business requests are not pending. He added that the whole Montenegro is on its way to prosperity and bright future. *“Public finances have stabilized, we have macroeconomic stability, and investment activity has increased. Economic growth rates which amount 4.8% are among the highest in the region,”* the Prime Minister said. The Budget for 2019 has to be balanced. *“Current consumption must be financed from the real sources. Not even a single euro will be taken from the indebtedness for current consumption,”* Markovic stated. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although the country enjoys a period of “euphoria”, major reforms should be implemented in order the country to come closer to the EU. Its Prime Minister declares political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment. Although the Government takes concrete measures against corruption, organized crime, and money laundering it is assessed that a lot should be done to reach such a level of economic activity; mainly in the field of public administration, public sector corruption, and money laundering. Montenegro shows activity within NATO trying to prove that it is an equal partner of the alliance with military capacity according to NATO standards. Although the state fulfills its obligations as a full member of the Alliance questions are raised for such initiatives due to their impact in Montenegro’s society but also in country’s foreign relations. A significant number of people is opposed in NATO and maintains pro-Russian stance while Montenegro’s presence in Kosovo may harm relations with Serbia.



ROMANIA: November 20th, leaders of Romania’s ruling party, the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), voted a significant reshuffling of the Government led by the Prime Minister Viorica Dancila. Some key members of the cabinet were changed, including the Deputy Prime Minister and Development Minister Paul Stanesco, who was removed from the Government after leading a rebellious faction within PSD that tried to remove Liviu Dragnea from the party’s helm. Ilan Laufer, who was Minister for the Business Environment in the Mihai Tudose cabinet, is the new Development Minister. Another important change is the transfer of Labor Minister Lia Olguța

Vasilescu to the Transport Ministry, where she replaces Lucian Sova. *“She has proved she can run important projects for Romania,”* Dancila said for Vasilescu’s nomination for the transport portfolio, which manages the country’s large infrastructure projects. MP Marius Budai, Head of the Chamber’s Budget and Finance Committee will take over as Labor Minister. Niculae Badalau, who returned by Dragnea’s side after criticizing him at the beginning of this year, will be the new Economy Minister, replacing Danut Andrusca. Alexandru Petrescu, a former Economy Minister and Minister of the Business Environment, was nominated for the Communications Ministry, where he will replace Bogdan Cojocaru. Gabriel Les will return at the helm of the Defense Ministry, replacing Mihai Fifor, who resigned yesterday, before the PSD meeting. Les was Defense Minister in the Tudose cabinet as well. The Government will also have new Ministers for culture and youth and sports. These changes come after new Ministers were also appointed recently for education, research, and European affairs. (www.romania-indider.com)

- November 22nd, Romania’s President Klaus Iohannis rejected, the Justice Minister’s Tudorel Toader proposal to appoint Prosecutor Adina Florea as the Head of National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA). The President also rejected four other nominations for senior Prosecutor positions within the General Prosecutor’s Office and the Anti-Organized Crime Directorate – DIICOT. He argued that the nominations did not meet all legal conditions. Toader sent Iohannis his nomination for the DNA Chief Prosecutor position in October 2018. Toader decided to support Adina Florea for this position despite a negative opinion of the Superior Magistracy

Council – CSM, which considered that Florea was unfit for this important position. DNA is the institution that investigates corruption offences by state officials. The DNA Prosecutors have sent many top politicians to court since 2014, when Laura Codruta Kovesi was appointed to manage the institution. However, Kovesi was dismissed this summer at the justice minister’s request. The request came as the ruling coalition’s leaders have been complaining about DNA’s abuses and both Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) leader Liviu Dragnea and Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE) leader Calin Popescu Tariceanu have been targeted by corruption investigations. (www.romania-indider.com)

- November 25th, Liberal Deputy Ioan Cupsa has announced today that the opposition parties will file a censure motion against the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), and Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE) Government on December 10th, 2018. However, Cupsa has not revealed if National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL), Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR) and People’s Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP) had managed to convince Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR) and other MPs of the ruling coalition to join their action. *“The censure motion will be filed around December 10th and it will be debated the following week. We hope it will pass and we hope to see a reshuffled Government. We need 50-60 more votes, at least in theory, from the Social Democrat Party. Following the latest tensions within PSD I think it is possible that the*

censure motion will pass,” Ioan Cupsa said. On the other hand, from the UDMR camp, leader of the Magyar Deputies, Attila Korodi said that nobody from PNL or USR had approached his party to talk about potentially endorsing the no-confidence vote. Korodi said that UDMR is open to talks. However, he mentioned there are some conditions to be met so that UDMR should consider a censure motion, the main one being the existence of a ruling team available from the Opposition camp, ready to take the reins. “There are very complicated things and I don’t think the situation has been currently so clarified so that the Parliament should take this step [of a no-confidence vote],” leader of UDMR Deputies concluded. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government has been transformed into an “open battle”. The President rejects Ministers’ nominations and Justice officials such as Prosecutors against corruption and organized crime. A major struggle has broken out between Iohannis and the Government regarding state administration’s readiness to take over the EU Presidency on January 2019. Iohannis directly asked for toppling the Government calling them “an accident of the Romanian democracy”. Opposition announced that beginning of December (December 10th, 2018) it will file a motion of no-confidence against the Government. Apart from that the EU released reports strongly criticizing the Government over rule of law and justice. Under these circumstances the Government announced a major reshuffle in an effort to reverse negative political climate. However, Romania has entered in political turmoil which may lead in rapid political

developments. It is assessed that opposition move for toppling the Government may be successful and early election could be announced. Iohannis strongly opposes in Government’s plans to intervene in judicial system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state’s justice. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning has become an advanced base close to Russia. Its strategic importance and role has been upgraded and high level NATO exercises take place in its territory.



SERBIA: November 22nd,

Aleksandar Vucic said it has been decided Serbia will take any countermeasures to Pristina's increase non-tariff barriers on goods from central Serbia. According to the President the decision was made at a session of the Council for National Security. “Bekgrade wants to remain a reliable partner to everyone in the world, Europe and the region,” the Serbian Government announced on its website. After the session of the Council, Vucic said that Serbia will act in a responsible way, thus showing the difference between serious and responsible moves and the moves made by Pristina. “We will not stop their trucks and passenger cars, or the traffic of goods to Kosovo and Metohija,” he said. “Pristina's decision is neither rational nor reasonable. That is why we are worried, but also a bit afraid because we are concerned about peace. We will have to take a variety of measures to make the world aware of what Pristina is doing, but also to see how to help our people,” Vucic said. He announced that the Serbian Government will address all the Governments of the members of the UN Security Council and the EU presenting the facts regarding Pristina's violations of the CEFTA agreement and

the Stabilization and Association Agreement. The President pointed out that all competent authorities should be fully prepared in the event of any irrational behavior of Pristina authorities, and all of them have been given specific tasks and will take appropriate measures. *"We will protect the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija,"* he said and added that he will hold a meeting with representatives of the Serbs from Kosovo tomorrow. The session was attended by the Prime Minister Ana Brnabic, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Nebojsa Stefanovic, Police Director Vladimir Rebic, Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications Rasim Ljajic. The session also featured Minister of Justice Nela Kuburovic, Director of the Office for Kosovo-Metohija Marko Djuric, Director of the Security Intelligence Agency Bratislav Gasic, Chief of the General Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces Lieutenant General Milan Mojsilovic, Secretary-General of the President Nikola Selakovic, as well as Chiefs of the security services. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications Rasim Ljajic said that Pristina's decision to increase non-tariff barriers on products from central Serbia by 100% will have huge negative consequences. There are two reasons for this decision - yesterday's vote in Interpol and the fact that the international community did not respond timely and sharply to the existing non-tariff barriers introduced by Pristina, the Deputy Prime Minister said. According to him, no Serbian producer can be competitive with such high quotas, taxes and duties introduced. Ljajic recalled that last year goods worth 440 million euro were exported from central Serbia to Kosovo, and that Serbia

purchased goods worth 21 million euro, while this year a 9% growth has been recorded, which means that the consequences will also be huge. (www.b92.net)

- November 23rd, the President Aleksandar Vucic held extraordinary meetings with the Chiefs of the Army and police and other security services. He also met with Commanders of Special Military and Police units regarding the current situation in Kosovo, the Government announced. Subsequently, Vucic and the Prime Minister Ana Brnabic held a meeting with the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Serbia Li Manchang and with Ambassador of the Russian Federation Alexander Chepurin. The meeting was also attended by Director of the Office for Kosovo-Metohija Marko Djuric. These meetings at the Presidency of Serbia were attended by the Minister of Defense Aleksandar Vulin, Chief of the General Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces Lieutenant General Milan Mojsilovic, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Nebojsa Stefanovic, Police Director Vladimir Rebic and Head of the Security and Intelligence Agency Bratislav Gasic. The meeting with President Vucic was also attended by the Commanders of special Military and Police units – the Commander of the Special Brigade Brigadier General Miroslav Talijan, Commander of the Military Police Directorate, Brigadier General Rajko Milovanovic, as well as Chief of the Intelligence Department of the General Staff Milan Todorov. Gendarmerie Commander Colonel Dejan Lukovic, Commander of the Special Anti-Terrorist Unit Spasoje Vulevic and Commander of the Police Intervention Units Dragan Vasiljevic were also present. The Prime Minister has canceled all her announced activities for the day and has been in the Presidency of

Serbia this morning, where she arrived after the session of the Government. After that meeting nobody gave statements to the media. (www.b92.net)

- November 23rd, Aleksandar Vucic and Ana Brnabic have asked China's Ambassador Li Manchang to tell the Chinese leadership that Serbia has *"never been in a more difficult situation."* Chinese Ambassador responded to this by saying he will notify the President of China about this in the course of the day. The President and the Prime Minister informed Li during a meeting in Belgrade of the latest developments of the situation, following the storming of Kosovo's ROSU units of northern (Serb) town of Kosovska Mitrovica this morning. Vucic and Brnabic asked Li to convey to the Chinese leadership that Serbia has *"never been in a more difficult situation, despite its constant calls for peace and stability, along with its a serious and responsible approach to solving all the problems."* *"The incursion of the ROSU unit to North Mitrovica has shown that the KFOR forces, or NATO, deliberately deceived general public, and today it is clear to everyone on whose orders and in collusion with which forces NATO representatives have lied,"* said Vucic. Brnabic said that, regarding the introduction of a 100% tax on Serbian goods - for which move she expect the reaction of the EU, since this is a case of a violation of the (EU) Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), as well as the (regional free trade) CEFTA agreement - it is also a matter for the UN because UNMIK, the UN mission in Kosovo, *"is one of the signatories"* - and in this regard, it expects China's support in the most important world organization. Li said that China *"perfectly understands what is happening in Kosovo and Metohija"* and that this is *"an already well-known*

scenario of attack on the integrity of Serbia." The Chinese Ambassador emphasized that during the day, President Xi *"will be informed about everything"* - and that Serbia can count on China's support." (www.b92.net)



Meeting of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Prime Minister Ana Brnabic with the Chinese Ambassador

(Photo source: www.srbija.gov.rs)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Security situation is becoming complex and uncertain due to Kosovo actions against not only Serbia, but Northern Kosovo as well. It seems that the Serbian Government puts on condition of increased readiness all state's security and defense forces. Serbia receives Kosovo actions such as announcement of the establishment of Kosovo Army, decision for 100% tariff on Serbian goods, and special police unit operation in the north as hostile ones and is getting prepared for worse scenarios included escalation of tension. Serbia seeks support from Russia and China (two UN Security Council members) describing situation as the "worst in last ten years. It is assessed that a possible Kosovo Police or military operation in the north may provoke Serbia's security forces engagement for the protection of Serbian population. At the moment, Serbia looks like acting in accordance with the international

law and aiming at reducing tension in the region. In other words state's leadership is acting in a "reasonable" and "wise" way avoiding mistakes of the past which have isolated Serbia from the international community. Of course, under this circumstances none could speak for restarting of Belgrade – Pristina dialogue. There are certain analysts who claim that such situation will inevitably lead in Kosovo partition with the north part going to Serbia. Some of them claim that this scenario has already agreed by Vucic and Thaci. Serbian repayment will be Kosovo recognition. By expressing neutrality and maintaining equal distance from the U.S.A and Russia it moves in an environment of fragile balance. Russia is getting involved in Kosovo case by supporting actively Serbian stance.



SLOVENIA: November 19th,

Party of Alenka Bratusek (Stranka Alenke Bratušek - SAB) and the Prime Minister Marjan Sarec are expected to reach a solution on the new Minister of Development and EU Cohesion Funds by November 23rd, 2018, SAB President Alenka Bratusek said. According to her, the new Minister should also come from SAB, and Sarec will also have to agree with her. She denied rumors that the resigned Minister, Marko Bandelli, also leaves parliamentary benches. *"Bandelli is a Deputy and nobody he would leave the bench,"* Bratusek said. Asked whether Bandelli could be replaced by the State Secretary at the Ministry of Finance Metod Dragonja she responded *"Everything is possible."* The Prime Minister forced Bandelli to resign due to inadequate communication and allegedly bad work at the Ministry. (www.dnevnik.si)

- November 21st, Defense Minister Karl Erjavec told the Slovenian National Assembly's Defense

Committee that Slovenia had signed a Government-to-Government agreement with the US on the procurement of 38 Oshkosh 4x4 Joint Light Tactical Vehicles (JLTVs) for the army's medium-sized battle group. Oshkosh Defense's Senior Vice-President of international programmes Mike Ivy on November 20th, 2018 welcomed the Foreign Military Sale, without giving details, but the Slovenian Ministry of Defense announced on November 21st, 2018 that deliveries would take place in 2021–23. The Ministry emphasized the importance of crew safety and protection in the decision to procure the JLTVs, which will replace the Slovak Armed Forces' ageing Humvees. The Left (Levica) party Coordinator Luka Mesec reacted in such announcement claiming the purchase of 38 armored personnel is not necessary, because Slovenia is not in any way under military threat. In this regard, the Ministry explained that modernizing the Army and investing in its equipment, which will enable the provision of national defense and collective defense within NATO, is crucial for its future development. As it emphasized *"safety standards are higher than in current vehicles and will provide much better crew protection."* As the Ministry added, Slovenia is one of the few countries that, in more than two decades of cooperation in various, even the most demanding international operations and missions, had no casualties among its members of the contingents. Therefore, in the future, one of the important criteria for equipping the Slovenian Armed Forces personnel is to provide the highest level of safety and security. (www.dnevnik.si, www.janes.com)



Oshkosh 4×4 Joint Light Tactical Vehicles
(JLTVs)

(Photo source: www.oshkoshdefense.com)

- November 21st, Slovenia's Police trade union filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Interior due to the adoption of an act on strike this year, which further limited the possibility of strikes in the Police, for all employees. The hearing at the Labor Court will take place on November 23rd, 2018. The law on organization and work in the Police limits Police Officers in strike activities. During the strike, Police Officers are obliged to protect life, personal safety of people and property, to prevent, detect and investigate criminal offenses, detect and apprehend offenders and other wanted people and hand them over to competent authorities. The union has sued the Ministry of Interior for the law regarding strikes which is, according to them, unlawful. The Ministry did not even send the act to the trade union for public consultation and dialogue, and therefore they consider it as an "unilateral act." The law sets restrictions in the Ministry's employees for joining strikes explained Alen Pecaric from the Police Trade Union of Slovenia. The Prime Minister Marjan Sarec during a working visit in the Ministry of Interior assured the Police that, despite the strike by both Police unions, it provides a high level of security for the

citizens. He also underlined that he believes that an agreement will be reached with Police unions. He claimed the Government is aware of the problem, and he expressed his confidence that it will be resolved through dialogue. (www.dnevnik.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Although Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability, the newly established minority Government faced its first crisis. Minister Bandelli forced by the Prime Minister Sarec to resignation due to a local scandal. Although SAB leader (where Bandelli comes from) reacted due to the fact Sarec did not inform her about the resignation it is assessed that it will not affect governmental stability. However, it is still unknown how the governmental cohesion will react in a major problem (migration, fiscal, or security). Border dispute with Croatia is still ongoing and former Government of Miro Cerar filed a lawsuit against Croatia over its refusal to implement the border arbitration and it is still a question how the new Government will continue with the case.



TURKEY: November 20th, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled against pre-trial detention of Selahattin Demirtas, the former co-chairman of the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi - HDP) who faces terrorism charges. Demirtas, has been in pre-trial detention since November 2016 after he and other executives and deputies of the HDP – who refused to show up in Courts and before Prosecutors after they were stripped of their parliamentary immunity – were arrested. The ECHR ruled that although there was “reasonable

suspicion” in the arrest of Demirtaş, the judicial grounds cited in the extension of his detention could not be regarded as “*sufficient*.” The Court unanimously ruled that his right to a speedy trial was violated. The Strasbourg-based Court also said that Demirtaş's rights to free elections were violated as he could not perform his duties as a member of the Parliament or take part in elections as the Head of the HDP. The ruling stressed that Demirtaş was jailed during two crucial political campaigns, namely the constitutional reform and presidential system referendum on April 16th, 2017, and the presidential and parliamentary elections on June 24th, 2018. Demirtaş came third with 8.4% of the votes in the presidential race, which he campaigned from a high-security prison in northwestern Edirne province. Asked to comment on the ruling, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said “*We are not bound by the [ECHR] decisions.*” Erdoğan said that nearly all decisions by the ECHR regarding the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is against Turkey, which has many options as a counter-move. “*It has never been the ECHR which came and restraint terror in Turkey. Terror went on, and it continues now. It is the Turkish people who pay the price.*” As a signatory of a European Convention on Human Rights, the Court's decisions are legally binding on Turkey. Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gül said he needed to see the ruling, but added that a Turkish Court would make the final decision on Demirtaş' case. Demirtaş was sentenced to four years and eight months in jail in September 2018 for carrying out terrorist propaganda in a speech in 2013. In 2016, he was also sentenced for insulting “*the Republic of Turkey, the Turkish nation, the Turkish state and state institutions.*” However, the most serious charges facing Demirtaş are related to the Kobani riots on October 6th – 7th, 2014, and the role of the HDP-linked officials and municipalities in the

PKK group's unilateral move to end the reconciliation period and launch an unprecedented barricade and trench warfare in cities and towns in Turkey's southeast. Demirtaş is accused of inciting hatred in the Kobani riots, which erupted at the height of DAESH terrorists' attack on northern Syria's predominantly Kurdish border town of Ayn al-Arab – also known as Kobani – which is controlled by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). Following Demirtaş's call to take to the streets, more than 50 people were killed and hundreds of others were injured in clashes between security forces and the sympathizers of HDP and the Free Cause Party (Hür Dava Partisi - Hüda-Par). (www.dailysabah.com)

- November 20th, the Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have marked the completion of the offshore phase of a gas pipeline underneath the Black Sea, the latest sign of growing cooperation between Moscow and Ankara. Speaking at a ceremony in Istanbul, Erdoğan said the TurkStream pipeline will carry 31.5 billion cubic meters of gas from Russia to Turkey each year when operational, and will send at least half of the amount to European markets. Work will now focus onshore and is on track to be completed by the end of 2019, he also said. Putin said the pipeline will help ensure European energy security, insisting that the project is “*not directed against the interests of anyone.*” The Russian President also said that Turkey will become a “*major European hub*” for the energy sector. The new pipeline is part of Moscow's efforts to bypass Ukraine as a gas transit route to Europe, which imports about a third of its gas needs from Russian energy giant Gazprom. Turkey is almost completely reliant on imports to meet its energy

needs. The Istanbul ceremony marked the completion of the building of two undersea lines stretching 930 kilometers across the Black Sea from Anapa in Russia to Kiyikoy in Turkey. Russia's state energy giant Gazprom has said that it sees Serbia and EU member-states Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Hungary as potential markets for Russia's natural gas supplied via TurkStream. (www.aljazeera.com)

- November 23rd, Turkey's Parliament speaker Binali Yıldırım warned oil companies against any activities around Cyprus island before an agreement is reached between the two communities (Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot). Speaking in Izmir, stressed that an agreement must be reached between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots before any submarine resources in the island's vicinity, including its Exclusive Economic Zone, could be extracted. "This is a breaking point," he said, adding that large oil companies drilling in the area must "mind their steps" on it. Resources in the Eastern Mediterranean have caused friction between Turkey and Cyprus. Earlier in 2018, Cyprus launched exploratory drilling activities for gas in the Eastern Mediterranean despite strong opposition from Turkey and Turkish Cypriot community, who argue that the island's natural resources should be exploited jointly to ensure equal rights for both parties. Yıldırım stressed that Turkey would not refrain from immediately responding to any attempts against interests of its own or the Turkish Cypriots in the region. Meanwhile, on November 21st, 2018 the so-called "Deputy Prime Ministry and "Foreign Ministry" of the Turkish Cypriot community released a statement claiming "*The Greek Cypriot side plans to increase tension in the Denya-Serhatkoy region and encourage some Greek Cypriots to violate the*

zone along the TRNC [namely the occupied by Turkish armed forces part of Cyprus] border," adding "*Recent developments in the region reveal that the Greek Cypriot administration is striving to create an artificial crisis.*" (www.yenisafak.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. Latest ECHR decision on HDP former leader Selahattin Demirtas is a hard slap for Turkish Justice and state practices. Turkish – U.S relations have strongly been harmed forcing Ankara to approach new allies such as Russia. Although Turkey re-examines its relations with the EU in an effort to avoid international and regional isolation, the EU sends messages of terminating the EU – Turkey accession talks. Turkish Armed Forces have been engaged in military operations against Kurds and PKK in Northern Iraq and in Syria as well. The state tries to show a leading role regarding Syria's "next day" claiming that developments in neighboring country are related to its national security mainly because of the Kurds. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. Regarding Turkish interests in East Mediterranean Sea it seems that they are reaching a critical point since Cypriots are ready to start next week hydrocarbon drills in their Exclusive Economic Zone via the US energy giant ExxonMobil. Is Turkey ready to move from rhetoric to action? It is rather difficult to see a direct harassment

against the drill ship (which is monitored by 4 U.S. vessels), but none could exclude a “hot” incident in the Aegean Sea. Turkey has announced for next week naval exercises including fires in the Aegean Sea by illegal NAVTEX. In the same time, it has announced that it will start drills within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone in an effort to escalate tension in the region. It seems that multilateral cooperation between Greece, Israel, Cyprus and Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt raises its concerns of regional isolation.

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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
-  Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk
-  Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict