



**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. 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.

#### **“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE**

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**ALBANIA:** November 6<sup>th</sup>, the French Ambassador to Albania, Christina Vasak, reacted for the first time after France decided against Albania's EU accession negotiations. Vasak said from Elbasan that the decision will be taken during the Zagreb Summit, May 2020. She underlined that Macron has clearly expressed his support to Albania and the other countries that want to open the EU accession negotiations. *"The decision of the European Council does not close the doors for Albania. It is a solemn decision, but not for definitely closing the doors for Albania. There is another meeting in Zagreb. This is an important meeting because Croatia will be taking the Presidency of the European Council and all the other EU members will be playing a crucial role, because the decision must be unanimous. The French President has clearly stated that Albania and the other countries will receive support for opening the negotiations,"* the Ambassador declared. (www.top-channel.tv)

- November 6<sup>th</sup>, opposition has further increased calls for early elections, as its leader Lulzim Basha is no longer saying he will not accept elections with Edi Rama as the country's Prime Minister, but that an electoral reform is necessary for the opposition to compete fairly. Opposition said on Wednesday it is already completing its draft for electronic identification and e-voting. Some of this issue's most important points were discussed during the Electoral reform group meeting on Tuesday, which lasted for more than two hours. E-voting has been the opposition's Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) main proposition also when it was part of the Parliament's Special Electoral Reform Commission. Sources from the meeting

said that opposition members are unified in thinking that e-voting success cannot come from a pilot project, but from its implementation in the entire country. After also consulting with electoral reform experts, former MP Oerd Bylykbashi spoke about party financing and campaigning. According to Bylykbashi, PD and its allies will seek in their draft party financing transparency and a lower electoral campaigning cost. *"We must guarantee to Albanians a complete transparency of party financing sources and sane ways to use them. Electoral campaigning cannot be something costly, it is something unacceptable to Albanians, there should be also reporting transparency and an efficient way to control who has broken the law and then to punish them, as in all European countries,"* Bylykbashi said. He also stated the opposition will increase work intensity for its version of the electoral alternative this week so that it can provide a product as soon as possible. He did not directly say to whom the opposition draft will be addressed to, but insinuated the connecting bridge between opposition and the governing majority will be the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the ODIHR. He accused the Government of acting against the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and that the opposition is fully engaged towards the reform, which was one of the nine conditions the German Bundestag, gave Albania to open negotiations with the EU. According to him, if Rama had the will for free and fair elections, the electoral reform would not have been an added homework for the country. Concerning party financing, the opposition plans to propose that it is conducted entirely from money stemming from the state budget, in order to avoid private financing from dubious sources. Parallel to this, it proposed that

private financing of parties be criminalized. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- November 6<sup>th</sup>, the Parliamentary Committees on Security and Defense from Southeast Europe hold their annual meeting in Tirana. The meeting focused on the increased dangers of cybercrime, including the monitoring of electronic communication for defense and security. While security dangers keep growing, Alban Elezi, a former vice leader at the Army Intelligence Service, now MP and member of the Security Commission, said in an interview for Top Channel that legislation in Albania need to change. The Intelligence Laws in Albania, adopted in 1998, have only been amended in 1999 and 2005, and the current law does not respond to the current reality. The Parliamentary Commission of Intelligence Services, according to Alban Zeneli, is not being applied normally. "Implementation is lacking and the law misses very important points. There is a special law which specifies that there is a parliamentary security subcommittee, led by the opposition, which has never been used for exerting parliamentary inspection on the Secret Service," Zeneli declared. (www.top-channel.tv)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Opposition increases its pressure against the Government to call snap elections. PD leader, Lulzim Basha has slightly changed his strategy by avoiding to keep pushing for the Prime Minister Edi Rama's resignation as a precondition for early elections. This fact could show that early elections are close and somekind of consensus is needed. Besides, Rama who carries the burden of failure towards the country's European future it would be much more difficult to remain in power.*

*The ongoing political crisis is expected to become deeper strengthening instability and uncertainty. Violent protests could not be excluded especially if Rama refuses to listen public demands and use Police violence against civilians. The Government is accused of having links with organized crime and current situation 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. What really needs the country is political stability and constitutional order for moving ahead with reforms. Election of Albin Kurti as the new Kosovo Prime Minister is a new challenge for Albania. His calls for unification of Albania and Kosovo may become a factor of destabilization and tension in the wider region of Southeastern Europe bringing Albania in the center of negative developments. Besides, the state maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.*



## **BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:**

November 5<sup>th</sup>, international community's High Representative Valentin Inzko criticized both the strongest Bosniak (Muslim Bosnians) Party, the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA) and Bosnian Serb officials in his peace implementation report before the UN Security Council for not contributing to the country's stability and implementing the necessary reforms on its EU and NATO accession path. The report covered the

period from April 16<sup>th</sup> to October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019 touching upon the most important events in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *“Nonetheless, October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019, marked one full year since the holding of general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018. It is with deep regret that I must report almost no progress on the formation of authorities during the reporting period, given that the new state-level Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers, the Federation entity Government and two of the 10 cantonal Governments have yet to be appointed. In contrast, the authorities of the Republika Srpska (entity) were established almost immediately following the elections and remain functional,”* Inzko said. In September, Inzko said, Party of Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD) leader and member of Bosnia's Presidency, Milorad Dodik, threatened to withdraw the RS from the agreements on legal transfers of competencies from the entities to the state signed by the two entities prior to the establishment of the single, Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the single High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Indirect Taxation Authority of Bosnia and Herzegovina, further claiming that other institutions, including the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Office of the Prosecutor and the State Investigation and Protection Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, were established in violation of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, without the consent of Republika Srpska, and should therefore be considered only as interim and not permanent institutions. *“Mr Dodik warned that all laws and decisions enacted under pressure of the High Representative, even those approved in the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina could be*

*declared to be invalid, and he has announced a session of the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska for early November to consider such proposals,”* he said. *“Moreover, in September, SDA adopted its party program declaration, establishing – not for the first time – its long-term goal of the adoption of a constitution that would define Bosnia and Herzegovina as the ‘Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina’, with three levels of authority; State, regional and local. The SDA declaration was unhelpful, given that it generated divisive pronouncements in Bosnia and Herzegovina,”* Inzko said. He continued, saying following the issuance of the SDA declaration, Dodik and other representatives of the RS met with the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, in Belgrade, where Dodik reportedly warned of conflict and solicited Serbia's intervention in the country. *“The current political situation again reveals the long-standing politically driven dysfunctionality at the State level, which is to a large extent a consequence of the aforementioned diverging viewpoints and policies. Those issues must be properly addressed without further delay,”* he pointed out. In conclusion, he reiterated that entities have no right to secede from the country and that the Dayton Agreement guarantees the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and provides that it shall consist of two entities; the Republika Srpska and the Federation. *“It appears that nearly 25 years since the signing of the General Framework Agreement, the political elite in Bosnia and Herzegovina have still not abandoned their long-term goals, as witnessed during wartime. For the Serb parties, this means achieving the independence of the Republika Srpska; for the Croat parties, this means a territorial-administrative reorganization to establish a third, Croat, entity; for some*

*Bosniak parties, this means a Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina with no entities,”* Inzko concluded. (www.ba.n1info.com)



The High Representative, Valentin Inzko, addressing the UN Security Council

(Photo source: www.ohr.int)

- November 7<sup>th</sup>, Bosnia's strongest political parties amongst the Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) and Croats agreed to run in next election cycle together in the constituencies where the two ethnic groups are the majority, the leaders confirmed following a meeting on Thursday, but they failed to agree on the state Government formation, a year after 2018 general elections. *“We had a good meeting in a good atmosphere; we have been in a coalition for a long time. I believe that we maintain the stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina,”* said Bakir Izetbegovic, the leader of the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA). *“This atmosphere should be transferred into more efficient cooperation. I think that despite the crisis that has been present for a year now, the results that Governments made are not bad,”* according to the Bosniak leader. But, the leaders failed to agree on the principles for the state-level Government formation, formally called the Council of Ministers. Despite the deal that the leaders of the three winner parties amongst three major ethnic groups signed in August, the country is still run by the old Government due to political

disagreements on Bosnia's NATO road. Although it supports the NATO membership, the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH) does not want to link the appointment of the Council of Ministers Chairman with the NATO i.e. Bosnia's first Annual National Program (ANP), the document that contains the guidelines for reforms that the Alliance want the country to implement. *“And this is where we disagree,”* said Izetbegovic, who finds that this matter is a matter of the rule of law and its protection. He believes the way out of this situation lies in a compromise. *“We have a common idea of having the authorities at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina established as soon as possible, which may give us an opportunity and chance during the Republic of Croatia's Chairmanship of the European Union when the candidate status of North Macedonia and Albania will be on agenda again. Bosnia and Herzegovina may appear in that package and the only obstacle to that is exactly the Government formation,”* the leader of HDZ BiH, Dragan Covic said. Talks will continue, announced the Croat leader, adding that the Mostar meeting was *“utterly open and friendly.”* (www.ba.n1info.com)

- November 9<sup>th</sup>, member of Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH's) Presidency Sefik Dzaferovic stated on Friday that the statement of French President Emmanuel Macron that BiH is *“a ticking time bomb”* is completely unfounded and inaccurate. According to Dzaferovic, since 2016, no departure to the Syrian battlefield has been recorded from BiH. Dzaferovic explained that according to agencies there are slightly less than 100 BiH citizens at the Syrian battlefield, where half of them are women. He emphasized

that BiH has taken measures, prescribed punishment for this type of activity and is successfully dealing with the issue. Therefore, that cannot be the reason why BiH would be called a ‘ticking time bomb’, Dzaferovic said. “The main problem that BiH has, and I believe President Macron knows it too, are those who want additional territorial, ethnic divisions in BiH and those that simply block the functioning of BiH institutions,” Dzaferovic said. A day earlier, Macron stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a “ticking time-bomb” and the greatest concern for Europe in the Balkans due to what he said was its “problem of returning jihadists.” (www.sarajevotimes.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*Lack of state’s Government since October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018 elections is an insurmountable obstacle which undermines stability and growth of the country. Not only that but it creates “fertile soil” for emerging ethnic tension and nationalistic rhetoric which is detrimental for Bosnia’s sustainability. Dayton Peace Agreement has been put into question by almost everybody including Bosnian Muslims (Bosniacs) threatening peace, stability, and coexistence of ethnic entities in the country. It is not a secret that political situation in Bosnia is alarming and at the moment it is considered as the most dangerous for a violent turbulence or a conflict in the region. High Representative, Valentin Inzko did not hesitate to emphasize his concerns during his report to the UNSC. Neighboring Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia’s internal affairs, while Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments.*

*Russia tries to “penetrate” in Bosnian affairs maintaining its influence in Southeastern Europe. As already “HERMES” has assessed Bosnia with no Government, no state budget, and no growth sliming slowly but steadily towards interethnic tension conflict. Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. EU path is too long for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU.*



**BULGARIA:** November 4<sup>th</sup>, with the Central Election Commission (CEC) having announced all ballots tallied, both rounds of Bulgaria’s 2019 local elections are over, bar whatever shouting – and court actions – there may be. The scorecard shows that Prime Minister Boiko Borissov’s center-right Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България - GERB) party won the mayoral elections in, out of 27 “regional centers” – meaning, cities that are capitals of districts, a total of 17. While the number is large, it is less than the dominating performance in major cities achieved by GERB in the previous local elections in 2015. Of GERB’s victories, eight were at the first round and nine at the second. Borissov’s party also found itself in more second-round contests than four years ago. Kornelia Ninova’s opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP) regained ground it had lost four years earlier, retaking the mayoral chairs – either with candidates in its own name or that it backed – in Blagoevgrad, Pernik and Razgrad, and decisively thrashing GERB’s candidate in Bulgaria’s



Danube city of Rousse, where Borissov's party had won at the first round in 2015. Apart from GERB's victories, of the 27 regional centres, the BSP won in four (all at the second round), Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi - DPS) held its traditional stronghold in Kurdzhali (at the first round), while five contests were won by mayoral candidates from local coalitions or initiative committees. In Sofia, Maya Manolova, the socialist-backed mayoral candidate who stood as an independent and was defeated by GERB incumbent mayor Yordanka Fandukova, is poised to challenge the election in Court. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- November 6<sup>th</sup>, Bulgaria's Government authorized a draft contract on the purchase of two minesweepers from the Netherlands, a statement after the Cabinet meeting said. Approving the draft contract, the Government authorized spending a sum of 1,996,000 euro, value-added tax excluded. It said that the purchase would serve towards the safety of navigation in Bulgarian waters in peacetime and help the country fulfill its obligations in wartime, at national level and at Allied level as part of the EU and NATO. The Cabinet authorized the Minister of Defense to negotiate and sign the contract, which will be subject to ratification by the National Assembly. The Netherlands navy is undergoing a series of changes. Of its Alkmaar-class minesweepers, it has sold some to Latvia and decommissioned others, while it currently has six. Bulgaria's military modernization plans also include the acquisition of two naval patrol vessels, to replace three Soviet-made patrol vessels that have become impractical to operate because of lack of spare parts and incompatibility with NATO standards. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- November 8<sup>th</sup>, Bulgarian President Rumen Radev has returned the proposal to appoint Ivan Geshev as Prosecutor General back to the Supreme Judicial Council, BNR reported. The motive of the Bulgarian Head of State is that only one candidature has deprived the procedure of a competitive nature. The hallmark of a democratic state is the availability of alternatives to senior Government positions, Radev said. Electing a Prosecutor is an act of high public importance and the way it is conducted should create trust, not doubts, the President added. If the Council re-approved Geshev's nomination, the Head of State would be obliged to appoint him to the position. (www.novinite.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

*Although the minor partner of the ruling coalition, the United Patriots, faces "structural" problems, the Government is stable. Local elections confirmed that the ruling GERB remains as the strongest political force in Bulgaria, although it is weakened compared to last local elections (held in 2015). Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). Lately, Bulgarian Government approved 1.9 million euro for purchasing 2 second-hand minesweepers from the Netherlands. However, military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.*



**CROATIA:** November 5<sup>th</sup>, Defense Minister Damir Krsticevic said on Tuesday that the Croatian Police were doing a great job guarding the state border and that the Army was ready to help, if necessary, because the security of citizens was of paramount importance. *“I think our Police are doing a great job guarding the state border. The security of our people is our responsibility. The responsibility for the border currently rests entirely with the Ministry of the Interior. The Croatian Army is always ready to help the Police,”* Krsticevic told the press when asked if the military should be included in protecting the state border against illegal migrants. He said that troops would be deployed along the border if need be because *“other countries also do that,”* adding that he could not see why the Croatian military would not join the Police in providing security to people. Krsticevic was asked this following the statement by presidential candidate Miroslav Skoro earlier in the day that the primary task of the Croatian Police was to protect the territory and citizens of Croatia, but that it would be good if other services, notably Armed Forces, were included *“before it is too late.”* ([www.hr.n1info.com](http://www.hr.n1info.com))

- November 7<sup>th</sup>, a report on the implementation of this year's National Reform Program in the period from May to October was adopted by the Government at Thursday's cabinet session. Finance Minister Zdravko Maric said that of the 100 planned activities, 22 had been carried out in their entirety, while implementation of the remaining 78 was under way. The main goal of the National Program, defined by the Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic cabinet back in April, is to boost economic competitiveness within a

projected growth of 2.5% percent in 2019. The document also identified progress made in the fulfillment of the recommendations proposed by the European Council, reform priorities, and headway made in economic policies as well as measures necessary to accomplish targets under the Europe 2020 Strategy. ([www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr](http://www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr))

- November 7<sup>th</sup>, the Homeland Security Council adopted recommendations for the future development of the national defense industry, which was the main topic discussed at the Council's two previous meetings. A press release from the President's office said that recommendations would be presented to the public in the coming period and that they would serve as the basis for further discussion and joint efforts in improving the competitiveness of Croatia's defense industry on the global market. The Council considers that the key to success is a synergy between state institutions and the business and academic communities as an essential precondition for accelerated technological development, particularly stronger investment in the research and development of new technologies. The press release further notes that an overview of the Council's work since its establishment was also presented at today's session. In that regard President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic underscored that the Council had opened some very significant issues related to national security, the defense system, the system of internal security and civil protection, and the system of homeland security in general. Croatia's geopolitical and security neighborhood, which is characterized by instability and constantly changing challenges, requires new and adaptable capabilities of a broad spectrum of system

stakeholders, and the Homeland Security Council has contributed significantly in that regard with its discussions and recommendations, the press release said. (www.hr.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*The country enjoys political stability despite the short disagreement between the main ruling HDZ and coalition partner HNS. The latter has threatened that it would not vote in favor of the 2020 state budget, while the Prime Minister sent the clear message that by not supporting the budget, HNS would be expelled from the ruling coalition. However, it seems that a potential political crisis was avoided in a challenging period for the country. Croatia received a positive recommendation by the European Commission for implementing all necessary criteria for entering the Schengen Zone. However, the final political decision by the member states requires a unanimous vote and it is expected to become a field of confrontation between Croatia and Slovenia. Slovenia has already expressed its intention to block Croatia's accession to the Schengen Area due to their border dispute. However, Croatia expresses confidence that finally it will get full support (Slovenia including) for entering the Zone. Croatia implements a hard-line foreign policy with its neighboring countries maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. There is much rhetoric lately for the Army deployment in Croatian borders regarding the migration issue. A presidential candidate and an opposition MP encouraged the Armed Forces engagement in the protection of borders. Defense Minister, Damir Krsticevic stated that currently it is not necessary to deploy military force but he did not exclude it for the near future. Croatia*

*implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.*



**CYPRUS:** November 5<sup>th</sup>, Finance Minister Harris Georgiades said on Tuesday that the importance of the citizenship by investment program should not be overestimated. Speaking at the Economist conference in Nicosia, the Minister said both those who supported the program and those who disagreed “*try to create a picture that we depend on it,*” adding that “*This is not true.*” The program, which was introduced in 2014 when economy was in deep recession, is said to have generated 6 billion euro by the end of 2018 and that some 4,000 Cyprus passports had been issued to third-country nationals that invested in the country. “*The impact is positive but relatively small,*” insisted Georgiades. “*I must admit in the initial years we made some isolated mistakes. We have to acknowledge it. We made some corrective moves from the beginning of this year including more credible audits.*” Georgiades said that unlike in the past, the investments Cyprus is now seeing were “*real*” and have a physical presence “*and are not in the shape of shell companies or outsized foreign bank deposits,*” he added. “*These are bad practices that we have left behind us and they will stay in the past,*” he said. The citizenship by investment program had come under attack in recent weeks after it was reported that eight Cambodians, with close links to their country's authoritarian regime had been granted passports. At the weekend it was revealed that Malaysian businessman, Jho Taek Low, wanted by the

authorities of his country and elsewhere, had been granted a passport in 2015. On Monday President Anastasiades said that passport's law should be revoked. Earlier this year, the Government, responding to criticism about lax procedures, introduced much tougher criteria for the scheme and has also decided to use the services of three companies to carry out due diligence checks on all applicants. Georgiades said that members of the private sector, which deal with the citizenship scheme, were complaining the new strict framework had killed the program. *"I do not agree with this. We have to understand the good name of our country is more important than selling another villa,"* Georgiades said. Anita Tuladhar, IMF mission Chief for Cyprus also commented at the conference during a Q&A, saying there were some concerns about the scheme. *"What we have seen is that investors have gone primarily to the high-end property market,"* she said. *"There is some concern that this might lead to a boom and bust cycle."* She said the IMF has seen some pickup towards that in the sector but this has not yet spilled over into other sectors as yet, she said. *"Tightening up is a step in the right direction,"* she concluded. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- November 8<sup>th</sup>, President Nicos Anastasiades will convene the National Council on Wednesday ahead of his meeting with Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci and the UN Secretary-General in Berlin on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019 the presidency announced on Friday. In the meantime, reports on Friday said that Anastasiades told former Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat the tripartite meeting in Berlin would be in vain and that the trip would be a waste of money. According to media reports in the north, Talat said during a

television show on Kanal T that he had met Anastasiades during a reception last week. To Talat's query whether there might be progress at the tripartite, Anastasiades reportedly replied that this would be an informal meeting. *"What do you expect from this meeting? We are going there in vain... waste of money,"* Anastasiades reportedly said. Government Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said he would not comment on media reports on the matter. *"What I do wish to reiterate is that the President is also now, as he has been for some time now, completely ready and willing for the Berlin meeting,"* he told the Cyprus News Agency. He said it was the Government's wish for the necessary consultations to take place for an agreement on the terms of reference and for the talks to restart. CNA, citing diplomatic sources reported that Nicosia seems to be holding a small basket ahead of the tripartite due to messages coming in on the intentions of the Turkish side. The same sources said that Nicosia was optimistic but also reserved about the outcome following information from diplomatic sources in New York and some European capitals since it seems Turkey does not want a tripartite meeting and aims at a five-party meeting with the guarantor powers after elections in the north next April. The tripartite is taking place basically because it has been scheduled, the sources said. Earlier in the day, Anastasiades said the tripartite meeting could yield results if the Turkish side displayed the same determination and willingness as the Greek Cypriots. On November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019 Anastasiades will hold talks with UN Special Envoy Jane Holl Lute in preparation for the tripartite. *"If the other side has the same determination and political will we have, the meeting can yield results,"* the President said. Asked whether there was any cooperation by Ankara, the President said he

wanted first to brief the national council over the information they had and if necessary, there will be public statements. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- November 9<sup>th</sup>, EU Foreign Ministers on Monday will adopt without discussion a regulation on restrictive measures against individuals and companies related to illegal Turkish drilling in the eastern Mediterranean, the Cyprus News Agency reported on Saturday. The EU has already decided to impose restrictive measures against natural and legal people related to, benefiting from, carrying out or supporting illegal Turkish drilling within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Republic of Cyprus. The decision of the 28 member states was taken at a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and was ratified at the highest political level by the European Council summit on October 17<sup>th</sup>. On Monday and following the technical preparations, the regulation is ready and is expected to be passed by the Ministers as an “An issue without discussion. The council, based on preparatory work already undertaken, agrees that a framework regime of restrictive measures targeting natural and legal people responsible for or involved in the illegal drilling activity of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean is put in place, and invites the High Representative and the Commission to swiftly present proposals to this effect.” (www.cyprus-mail.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

Although invasion of Turkish drillship Yavuz in Cypriot EEZ continues challenging the state's sovereignty, Cypriot authorities focus on restarting of peace talks. The tripartite meeting (UN, Republic of Cyprus, and Turkish Cypriot community) will meet on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in

*Berlin, but the Turkish Cypriot side and the Greek Cypriot administration leaking that it would be “an informal meeting with almost nothing to expect.” The truth is that it is not very likely to see a five-party meeting (Cyprus, Great Britain, Greece, Turkey, and the Turkish Cypriot community) in the near future since no progress has been done so far and Turkey continues to challenge the Cypriot sovereignty. However, Bi-communal and bi-zonal federation is the basis for a negotiation, according to Cypriot officials. Lack of military power and more specifically aeronautical power is critical for Turkish uncontrolled actions. Cyprus continues to work by diplomatic means on resolving the crisis but the fact is that Turkey has consolidated its presence in the Cypriot waters. Current situation has not only political and diplomatic repercussions, but also economic ones. Turkey rejects any possibility of unilateral (by Cyprus) exploitation of hydrocarbons within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) without equal participation of the Turkish Cypriot community. The presence of Turkish drill ships accompanied by warships forced oil companies to reconsider their activity in Cypriot waters due to safety reasons. EU will announce next week restrictive measures against individuals and companies related to illegal Turkish drilling in the eastern Mediterranean. As long as tension remains in eastern Mediterranean, there is always a high risk of an armed “hot” incident or a conflict. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. 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:** November 4<sup>th</sup>, in a sign of its growing military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, Greece launched last week the “*MEDUSA 9*” joint military exercise with Egypt south of Crete and the Peloponnese, while Greek fighter jets prepare to take part in the multinational “*BLUE FLAG*” drill which begins on Sunday in the Uvda region of southern Israel. Moreover, in a rather rare move, two Greek F-16 fighter jets on Friday escorted a US B-52 bomber from an area over western Greece to Nicosia’s Flight Information Region (FIR) off eastern Cyprus, where they parted ways. The American aircraft continued on an east-bound course to Syria, while the Greek jets returned to their base at Souda on the island of Crete. Meanwhile, the joint exercise between Greece and Egypt, with the participation of Cyprus, will continue until November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019. It is being attended by observers from 15 countries, including the US, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and others. Greece is taking part with three frigates, two missile boats, a submarine, a landing ship, an early warning aircraft, eight F-16s, three Chinook helicopters, four Apache attack helicopters and Special Forces units. Egypt is participating with a helicopter carrier, a frigate, a missile boat, a submarine, six F-16s and Special Forces units. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- November 5<sup>th</sup>, the Defense Ministers of Greece, Egypt and Cyprus on Tuesday condemned Turkey's illegal activities in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), its violations of Greece's airspace and territorial waters, as well as the Syria incursion, in a joint statement issued after a trilateral meeting in Athens on Tuesday. Greek

Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos, his Egyptian counterpart Mohamed Ahmed Zaki and Cyprus' Defense Minister Savvas Angelides also said they were in favor of a political solution to the problems facing Libya. The three Ministers said they will seek a deeper cooperation in defense and technology field. “*Our common vision and aim is to create an environment and consolidate peace and prosperity in the wider region for the benefit of our people,*” Panagiotopoulos said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- November 10<sup>th</sup>, Police presented Sunday the rifles and ammunition found at a home belonging to a member of the “*Revolutionary Self-Defense*” terrorist group. “*Fortunately, our intervention was timely...What is frightening, is the amount of explosives they possessed,*” Lefteris Hardalias, Commander of the Police's Counter-Terrorism Agency. Officers arrested two men and a woman allegedly implicated in terrorism activities and detained another 15 people on Saturday. Police said they raided 13 houses, seizing five AK-47 assault rifles, a submachine gun, two pistols, detonators, dynamite, TNT and grenades. Two male suspects, aged 41 and 43, have been linked to a robbery at a betting shop in the Athens suburb of Holargos in October. The third suspect, a 39-year-old woman, was detained for violating firearms laws. She is believed to be the partner of another suspect, a 46-year-old anarchist, who remains at large. (www.ekathimerini.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** █ :

*Greece enjoys political stability. The Government strengthens its efforts to fight domestic terrorism and achieved to arrest three suspects seizing significant quantities of weapons and ammunitions. It was a major success against*

internal leftist terrorism after a long time demonstrating the Government and security forces' decisiveness to crack down the problem. In the meanwhile, Police continues its operations against illegal occupation of abandoned buildings by anarchists around Athens; a significant security problem. It should be noted that Greece is one of the last European countries faces domestic activity by left-ideology terrorists. "Novartis" bribery case will remain in the central political scene in the near future as a source of tension. Establishment of a special investigative Committee to investigate allegations of political interference in the case raised political tension between the ruling ND and opposition SYRIZA. At the moment, migration is the main security problem of Greece. Good weather contributes in maintenance of a stable flow from Turkish coasts towards Greek islands. Control of migrant flows coming from Turkey is a critical point for Greek national security and consequently EU's security. The Government focuses its efforts on relieving the islands of eastern Aegean Sea (Lesvos, Samos, Chios) from a burden that it may come out of control threatening law and order in these small communities. At the moment, the Government tries to find ways of addressing the problem. In this context, it is planned new reception centers with restricted in and out for migrants to set up. Greek – Turkish relations are in a critical point not only due to Turkey's decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills, but also because Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial and maritime sovereign rights. Greece is concerned due to Turkish intention to search for hydrocarbons within its EEZ near to Kastelorizo region. The critical question is "how Greece would react if a Turkish

drillship would appear in its territorial waters." Turkey has targeted the wider area of Kastelorizo (and Northeast Aegean Sea) issuing several NAVTEXs for naval exercises with live fires. Moreover, Turkish fighter jets massively violate Greek airspace, while Turkish drones fly over Greek islands or islets. Turkey keeps upgrading provocations against Greece with a "hot" incident always to be in the foreground. In this context, Turkey has changed its rhetoric against Greece by accusing it of mistreating the Muslim minority in Greece and of slaughtering Ottomans during the 19th century. Lately, Greece has changed its stance towards Cyprus by sending repeatedly fighter jets over the Cypriot sky in a strong message that Greek Armed Forces are present in the island at any time to support its defense. Greece seeks to modernize its Armed Forces by receiving US military aid. It is a fact that Greek military force has been affected by the long economic crisis threatening the balance of power with Turkey. Currently, Greece is in talks with France for purchasing two advanced frigates BELHARA. Taking into consideration the ongoing provocations in the Aegean Sea and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ, security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey.



**KOSOVO:** November 6<sup>th</sup>, the Head of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA) Shpend Maxhuni resigned from that post, the KoSSev news portal reported on Wednesday. KoSSev said that the resignation was confirmed by outgoing Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj in a social media post. "I accepted the resignation of KIA Director Shpend Maxhuni," Haradinaj wrote, recalling that he decorated the former intelligence

Chief for loyalty to his homeland. He added that Maxhinu played a special role in the efforts of his Government to reinforce the rule of law. *“The KIA is now one of the most professional and most reliable institutions in the country,”* Haradinaj wrote. Maxhuni was Director of the Kosovo Police for several years before being appointed to head the KIA in March 2018. The Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) movement (which won the recent parliamentary elections) demanded Maxhuni’s resignation after illegal weapons and a small amount of a suspected narcotic were found in his son’s car. Vetevendosje and its leader Albin Kurti also blamed him for the illegal deportation of six Turkish opponents of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and claimed he was under the control of Kosovo President Hashim Thaci. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- November 6<sup>th</sup>, the politician expected to head the next Kosovo Government, the Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) movement leader Albin Kurti told N1 that his cabinet will include an obligatory Serb Minister who will not necessarily be from the Belgrade-backed Serb List (Srpska Lista). *“I will respect the Constitution but there is a fundamental difference between a constitutional obligation and a political coalition. We are trying to form a ruling coalition which will not need the votes of the Serb List which will be in the opposition. Serb nationality does not mean party affiliation but only nationality,”* N1 program Director Jugoslav Cosic said during an interview for the Pressing talk show. Kurti said he had not spoken to the Serb List yet adding that he will not *“excommunicate them in Parliament because they are MPs.”* *“I feel that the elections in Serb majority municipalities were not free and fair,”* he

said. According to him, there were cases of one Serb voting 18 times and cases of more votes being cast for the Serb List than there were voters in some areas. He said the blame for that lies with Kosovo institution. *“It is a bad thing that we had election fraud in communities with majority Serb populations as international observers reported. There were many incidents like thos because of pressure from Belgrade to win 100%,”* Kurti said. *“I am not blaming the Serb List, they are passing on the pressure they feel, that is Belgrade’s pressure on the Serb List is passed on to the Serb population in Kosovo,”* he said. Asked why he is eliminating the Serb List, Kurti replied that Belgrade is paying for obedience and added that Kosovo’s institutions and the international community have to prevent Belgrade from pressuring the Kosovo Serbs. *“I have nothing against the Serbs, on the contrary I have many Serb friends in Kosovo. The problem with the Serb list is that they are Belgrade’s tool... and that is a huge problem,”* Kurti said. He said that the Government which he expects to form in the next few weeks will start a dialogue with the Kosovo Serbs about economic development, not reconciliation. *“Ask the Serbs and Albanians what they need and they will say jobs and justice and that should be a priority,”* he said. Kurti said he would also start talks with the new EU High representative Josep Borell. *“We need a dialogue in Brussels along with the dialogue with Serbia,”* Kurti said. Kurti said that his Government would replace the 100% tariffs on Serbian goods through reciprocity which he said is *“the principle for healthy constructive relations.”* *“We will draw up a list of everything needed for reciprocity with Belgrade,”* he said. According to him, Serbia has to do something in other fields before the tariffs are revoked and only then should a dialogue be



prepared. *“We do not have the luxury of allowing another dialogue to fail,”* he said. Asked if he would come to Belgrade for talks, Kurti said the two sides should meet in Brussels. He said his team would have two segments – a political segment which would include the opposition and a team of experts for the various aspects of a future agreement. *“The most important things are three principles – no agreement without a dialogue, no dialogue with maps and no Presidents around the maps only demarcation experts. That will help us move from ambition and appetites for each others’ territories to civil rights and community needs,”* he said and added that he does not think an agreement can be reached by next spring. Kurti said that he views demarcation as an unacceptable racist concept. *“There will always be Albanians and Serbs on both sides of the border. Demarcation yes, but not an exchange of territory because that is not a dialogue for peace but a dialogue leading to future conflicts,”* he said. *“There can be no reconciliation without trust. We need trust and we do not have it because we are talking about agreeing on values and we disagree on the facts of the war in which we were all involved. We need to agree on values but reconciliation requires agreement on the facts,”* he said. Kurti said he would insist on all crimes being investigated. *“The past does not pass easily and it is always in the present. We have to face the past to move forward. There were crimes committed against Serbs and I want us to have normal courts which will sentence Albanians who killed Serbs,”* he said. Asked why he has a flag of Albania on his office wall, Kurti said he would have a flag of Kosovo in his cabinet as Prime Minister. *“The Albanian flag is very old and there is a lot of history in it. The Kosovo flag will be in the Prime Minister’s office. When the flag of*

*Kosovo was adopted, there was no democracy or history in the flag, just geography and the Albanian flag became the flag of resistance,”* he said. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- November 7<sup>th</sup>, Kosovo’s Central Election Commission (CEC) announced on Thursday the final results of the October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019 snap legislative elections, after a month of turmoil connected to problems with the count. Snags included ballots sent from Serbia being poisoned, resulting in CEC officials being sent to hospital, to multiple arrests made in various municipalities for falsifying the vote count. As it was expected, Albin Kurti’s Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) movement won the most votes, with a total of 220,811 votes, or 26.29%. Vjosa Osmani’s Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK), came close behind in second place, with 206,458 votes, or 24.46%. Incumbent President of the Assembly Kadri Veseli’s Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Demokratike e Kosovës - PDK), came third with 178,645 votes, or 21.16%. Outgoing Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and his coalition, comprising his Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës - AAK) and the Social Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Socialdemokrate e Kosovës - PSD), came fourth with 96,883 votes, or 11.47%. Vetevendosje and LDK are expected shortly to form a coalition Government, according to Avdullah Hoti, an LDK member involved in negotiating the coalition agreement between the two parties. *“We are working to harmonize the Government program, which will reflect the will of citizens,”* wrote Hoti on social media. Some 1,961,000 citizens were registered to vote, and this year’s election saw the highest voter turnout

of any past election, with 844,121 ballots accepted, a turnout of 44.72% voter, due in part to record numbers of Kosovars in the diaspora registering to vote. However, 25,485 votes were deemed invalid for reasons such as votes being handed in after the deadline or voter fraud. Three parties that formed a coalition were unable to gain any representation in the new Parliament. The bloc comprising by Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA Social Demokrate – NISMA), the New Kosovo Alliance (Aleanca Kosova e Re - AKR) and the Justice Party (Partia e Drejtësisë - PD), only received 42,272 votes, or 4.9%. Parties or blocs must win at least 5% of the votes cast to win seats in the Assembly. The bloc plans to appeal, seeking a recount of the votes. Kosovo's Serb minority representation in Government remains unchanged. The Belgrade-backed Serbian List (Srpska Lista) party won 57,015 votes or 6.7%. (www.balkaninsight.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**      :

*Winners of the October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019 early parliamentary elections, Vetëvendosje and LDK have reached an agreement of forming a Government and announcement of official results by CEC will accelerate the Government's establishment. A new era has come to Kosovo since traditional political forces of President's Hashim Thaci PDK and outgoing Prime Minister's AAK were defeated. In other words, former KLA militants who formed the political elite after war lost power and control of the entity. Kurti is a nationalist hardliner and it is assessed that dialogue with Belgrade will not be facilitated in the near future. Not only that, but it seems that Kurti's strategic choice is to force Kosovo Serbs to cut lines of communication with*

*Serbia and Kosovo authorities to fully control north. Such opinion is dangerous since the balance of co-existence between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians is very sensitive. However, Kurti is slightly changing his stance as he is getting closer to power, by stating that he will accept a Minister of Srpska Lista but he will not form a political coalition with the Serb party. Deployment of security forces and the newly established Kosovo Army in the north may become a reason for turbulence and an armed conflict. Besides, Kurti advocates unification of Albania and Kosovo; a view which will threaten peace and stability not only in Kosovo – Serbia but in the whole Western Balkans. International community namely the US and EU strengthen their efforts towards restarting dialogue between the two parties after elections. It seems that the US pays special attention in Kosovo problem by appointing Ambassador Richard Grenell as special envoy for Kosovo – Serbia dialogue; together with special envoy for western Balkans Matthew Palmer. Restart of bilateral negotiations could not be expected before December 2019 or beginning of 2020 provided that Kosovo will revoke tariffs imposed to Serbian goods. Increased tension is expected in North Kosovo by Kosovo Serbs if Serb List representatives will be excluded by the new Government. Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Kosovo unresolved status, political instability, corruption, and organized crime are not encouraging factors for its future*

*within European community. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard.*



**MOLDOVA:** November 7<sup>th</sup>,

participants in the Bavaria Conference, which ended on Tuesday, like in the Bratislava 5+2 format meeting [held on October 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019] failed to achieve consensus on some issues, Transnistria President Vadim Krasnoselsky stated at his news conference held in Moscow on Wednesday. Krasnoselsky called as “*inappropriate and tactless*” the Moldovan side’s attempts to put up for discussion at the Bavaria Conference a number of questions that had not been considered in Bratislava. “*The Moldovan side should not have acted so. This is categorically incorrect. One has to be prepared to a discussion. It is necessary to get thoroughly prepared on the issues that are included into the agenda. We have not been offered to study these questions beforehand. So we did not consider them,*” the Tiraspol leader said. Krasnoselsky believes it is inexpedient to politicize the negotiation process because “*time for this is not ripe yet. And those politicians, who want to combine the 5+2 negotiating format with the opening of the Third Basket, are acting shortsightedly and are driving negotiation process into a deadlock.*” (www.infotag.md)

- November 8<sup>th</sup>, Moldova President Igor Dodon presumes that the probability of Sandu Government’s resignation and of snap election holding to be “*very high,*” he stated to journalists following consultations held with ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS)] bloc Deputies on Friday

morning. “*Socialists can see only 2 possible ways out; either the Government revokes its amendment Law on the Prosecution Service adopted by the Government last Wednesday by assuming responsibility on itself before the Parliament or the Party of Socialists submits to Parliament a draft Resolution on dismissal of the Government. The ACUM bloc is insisting that the Government’s Law should be left in force, or that the Parliament should approve the same document today,*” Dodon said. The President has proposed Deputies to revoke the Law from Parliament and to send the governmental initiative to the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe for consideration. “*We regard the Law as one going against the Constitution. In 30 days from now, the Venice Commission will start considering a package of laws on Moldova, so we can well ask the Commission to give its conclusion on this Law as well. But our ACUM colleagues would not agree to this, though they realize it is undesirable to sharpen the crisis and provoke an early parliamentary election,*” Dodon said. The President urged all parties concerned to agree to a compromise before the Parliament plenary meeting scheduled for 15.00 hours on Friday. “*I called all Deputies to not burn bridges. It cannot be excluded that in case of Sandu Government’s resignation, another Government may be formed next week, which will also be a PSRM/ACUM Government. Nothing can be excluded. The Party of Socialists shall not agree to create coalitions with other parties,*” stressed the President. In his opinion, decisions should be taken with an account of national interests, “*but an early election does not correspond to our national interests. Our citizens are tired of crises, endless elections and instability.*” “*However, the probability of a snap parliamentary election*

currently is very high. If we fail to achieve a compromise, a draft parliamentary Resolution on a vote of no confidence in the Government will be submitted to Parliament, and the document will have to be considered as early as next week,” said the President. Asked about the development partners’ reaction to a possible resignation of the Government, Dodon replied “partners evaluate concrete deeds. They have stated many a time that they support not concrete politicians but the process of reforms and the people who promote the reforms.” (www.infotag.md)

- November 8<sup>th</sup>, Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) registered a motion of censure against the Government led by Maia Sandu in Parliament today. The document was recorded immediately after the cabinet had taken responsibility in Parliament for the draft on amendment of the Law on the Prosecutor General’s Office. The motion was read by PSRM lawmaker Vasile Bolea in Parliament’s plenum and is to be considered by the Juridical Commission for rules and immunities and will be afterwards discussed at the next Parliament meeting. “In June 2019, the Government sworn in office in difficult conditions of political uncertainty re-brought the citizens’ hopes in the states’ institutions. Citizens hoped that the management of the state’s affairs would be more efficient and the transformations for the better will not let themselves to be long awaited. Instead of changing the wrong direction in which the country was moving, the current government became a cabinet which, though its inaction in various directions of social and economic activity, harms the interests of the present and next generations of citizens. The new draft on the

Prosecutor General’s Office, assumed by the cabinet on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019 seriously endangers the independence of the Prosecutor’s office and politicizes this institution. The Sandu Government infringed the elementary democratic principles; it changed the game rules during the game, ignored the good practices in the field of nomination of a Prosecutor General, ignored the Constitution and the opinion of the Venice Commission, replaced the Parliament on a subject of public interest, avoiding public debates and the most serious thing in the present situation, it betrayed the confidence of the political and international partners,” Bolea said. He informed that PSRM would not tolerate the actions of the cabinet of Ministers, which it describes as “responsible for the failure of the justice reform.” “The new draft law assumed by the Government worsens even more the difficult situation in the justice sector and puts an end to the state’s efforts to reform the Prosecutor General’s Office according to a European model. The principle of separation and balance of the executive and judicial powers is infringed by this document assumed by the Government,” Bolea added. While the PSRM MPs were unveiling the motion of censure in Parliament’s plenum, more citizens were protesting outside the Parliament building to back the Government and the Prime Minister. (www.moldpres.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**      :

A political crisis has broken out in Moldova. It seems that the period of “euphoria” between PSRM and ACUM block has reached an end and disputes are reign in their “unconventional” relationship. PSRM filed a motion of no confidence against the Government due to a

*disagreement on the law amending the Prosecutor General appointment procedure. Everybody knew that coexistence of pro-western ACUM block and pro-Russian PSRM is a difficult and sensitive issue. President Igor Dodon had warned a week earlier [read issue 54 of "SEE at a Glance"] that he is in favor of implementation of mutual agreements with ACUM block, but added that there are "red lines." It seems that cooperation of the two parties touched these "red lines." It is assessed that the Government will collapse and early elections will be called (with a little possibility of a new Government to be formed by the existing Parliament). Although Prime Minister Maya Sandu has rejected any possibility of cooperation with PDM, one should not exclude a future replacement of PSRM from PDM. EU and the US, have sent messages for mutual consensus supporting cooperation of the two parties. Transnistria is a case which concerns Moldova and withdrawal of Russian troops is a priority for the Government. It should be noted that Russia closely follows political developments in Moldova and it will not allow any overcome of its "red lines" such as Moldova's integration in NATO or EU. Moldova is considered as a pivotal country for Russian national security. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.*



**MONTENEGRO:** November 5<sup>th</sup>, a team of US cyber personnel has been deployed to Montenegro to work with Montenegrin counterparts in order to counter malicious cyber actors on critical networks and platforms. The US Embassy in Montenegro announced this last week without providing more information on the teams,

writes Pobjeda daily. The US specialized security portal CyberScoop revealed new details in its research, suggesting that it is about a mission known as "Hunt Forward" operations and is relatively new for Cyber Command. "Last year, along with Montenegro, Cyber Command also deployed its personnel to Ukraine and North Macedonia to gain insights into adversarial cyberthreats in preparation for the 2018 midterm elections," Shannon Vavra wrote in the article "Pentagon deploying again cyber personnel abroad to gather intel for 2020 elections." This mission, the article says, typically sends anywhere between five and 30 US service members to hunt for malware at a time and "is broadly defined as an intelligence-gathering one and a protection one." CyberScoop reminded that both Montenegro and the US have been targeted by the Russian Government-linked hacking outfit APT28 or Fancy Bear. "If Cyber Command uncovers similar activity again in Montenegro, those insights could inform decisions on how to safeguard the US." During to his recent visit to Podgorica, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the US has been able to protect against the latest Russian malware as a direct result of insights gathered from last year's collaboration with Montenegro. "The Montenegro mission is the only Hunt Forward operation ongoing right now. Earlier this year Cyber Command told reporters it had ongoing deployments abroad with multiple allies, which it declined to name. These have each ended at this time," the article said. ([www.cdm.me](http://www.cdm.me))

- November 5<sup>th</sup>, Foreign Minister Srdjan Darmanovic said he did not participate in any negotiation on ceding any part of the Montenegro territory to any neighboring state. Responding to

Democratic Front (Demokratski Front - DF) allegations at the Assembly, Darmanovic said that such negotiations had never been held, nor could be. DF MP Milun Zogovic said the border issue with Kosovo was not closed. *“Our side left the possibility of derogation from the Demarcation Agreement with Kosovo, although it has been ratified,”* Zogovic said. Based on the statements of Kosovo politicians, Zogovic concludes that the Agreement will not be respected and that borders will be changed. Darmanovic denied it and said that Montenegro has very good relations with Kosovo, based on the principles of trust and common EU perspective. Darmanovic recalled that the Demarcation Agreement with Kosovo entered into force in June 2018. *“The demarcation of the state border can only be determined within the framework provided for in the Agreement,”* Darmanovic said. The Minister said that Montenegro had successfully completed the demarcation issue with BiH. (www.rtcg.me)

- November 6<sup>th</sup>, Montenegro’s Defense Minister, Predrag Boskovic, held a briefing for the representatives of the Assembly Defense Committee. The theme of the briefing was development of the capacities of the Armed Forces of Montenegro and contemporary hybrid threats from the point of view of NATO and the EU, with special emphasis on our country’s exposure to that special kind of warfare. As representatives of the Ministry reported, Boskovic talked about the new Formation of the Armed Forces, its territorial distribution, participation in NATO and EU operations and missions, achieved and projected modernization results, infrastructure, results achieved in the area of destruction of surplus weapons and improvement of social and material status of the members of the

Armed Forces and Ministry staff. *“Minister reminded that number of members of the Army was expected to increase, with the aim of strengthening support capacities. He pointed out that average age of the members declined from 41 to 37 years,”* said the representatives of Ministry. He emphasized results achieved in the modernization of the Armed Forces in all three segments – Navy, Air Force and Land Forces. Boskovic also praised results achieved in destroying surplus weapons of former Yugoslavia and said that more than 90% of such weapons had already been destroyed. *“Minister also spoke about the military training ground on Sinjajevina, formation of the Regional center for Mountain warfare in Kolasin, provision of four Bell 505 helicopters and 67 light-armored vehicles both for infantry groups, and 80 transport trucks and other special vehicles. Projects of special interest will be development of the barracks in Masline, construction of barracks in Andrijevica, and Kapino polje airport,”* said the representatives of the Ministry. (www.cdm.me)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :**

*Political tension and abnormality continues as ruling DPS insists that there is no need for a transitional Government rejecting opposition’s request. Opposition appears divided strengthening ruling DPS’s power. A possible boycott by opposition of the next parliamentary elections will have negative impact in country’s political stability, consolidation of democracy, and economic growth. Although EC Progress Report is assessed as a positive one, it raises specific concerns over media freedom, corruption and organized crime. Report is elaborating on specific cases signaling detailed research.*

*Montenegro enters into a crucial crossroad regarding its EU future and specific reforms and actions should be implemented if it remains committed in its goal to access the EU by 2025. In this context, it is still doubtful if EU will proceed with opening of Chapter 8 in accession negotiations with Montenegro. The Government promotes state's political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment. However, the state needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Russian influence continues to be considered as a "threat" against state's national security. In this context, US personnel specialized in Cyber Warfare has been deployed in Montenegro (North Macedonia and Ukraine too) aiming to encounter hybrid threats and collect useful intelligence regarding Russian activity in the region. Moreover, Serbian intervention in Montenegrin internal affairs is considered also as a notable problem which needs to be resolved. Serbia refuses to abandon the view that Montenegro is the "natural extension of the country." The country focuses on strengthening its Armed Forces by purchasing modern equipment and reducing the average age of its military personnel (currently 37 years old).*



#### **NORTH MACEDONIA:**

November 5<sup>th</sup>, *"we understand that the signal that was given was very negative and we do not want this to cause a reaction against France and its position, but this message should not be perceived as a negative action towards North Macedonia.*

*France believes that all countries of the region are part of the European continent, but it is necessary for the EU reform on the inside,"* Vice-President of the French Senate Helene Conway-Mouret said in an interview with MIA. *"It is not a veto or rejection by France, because Paris does not want to block the process. The negative decision on the issue was because maybe the present EU is not prepared to accept new member-states and it is necessary to see certain criteria that would help this process,"* says Conway-Mouret while elaborating the failure of the European Council to decide on giving a date for the start of EU accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. *"What I can say is that there is a need for urgency, an issue that the executive in France is well aware of, in order to make progress as soon as possible and clarify what is expected of North Macedonia and Albania,"* adds Conway-Mouret. According to her, ratification of North Macedonia's NATO Accession Protocol in the French National Assembly, following its endorsement by the Senate, would depend on the institution's agenda. However, she adds, this will occur shortly and without any problems. *"I cannot confirm whether this is going to happen before the NATO summit in London. I can only say that the vote in the National Assembly will not encounter any problems,"* notes Conway-Mouret. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- October 30<sup>th</sup>, North Macedonia's Prime Minister Zoran Zaev has rejected all speculations that North Macedonia had been invited to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) during a press conference today. *"It seems there is a protective wall around the Government and we have not received such an invitation. We are not looking to*

*get one, either,”* Zaev said in response to a reporter’s question about an alleged invitation for North Macedonia to join EAEU, after failing to get a start date for EU accession negotiations. A day earlier, on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019 Russia’s Permanent Representative to the EU, Vladimir Chizhov addressed an invitation to Albania and North Macedonia to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) during the Eurasian Economic Forum in Verona, Italy on Friday. Albania and North Macedonia will find understanding sooner within the EAEU than in the EU, the Russian diplomat noted. *“I am sure that the countries, which are candidates for EU membership and have recently been ‘put on ice’ by Brussels, could find more understanding in the Eurasian Economic Union,”* Chizhov said. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- November 10<sup>th</sup>, The final goal of the “*mini Schengen*” initiative is mutual recognition of all documents including the documents of food agencies, university diplomas and so on, North Macedonia’s Prime Minister Zoran Zaev said in Ohrid on Sunday following the agreement he reached with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Albania’s Prime Minister Edi Rama on free movement of people, goods, services and capital among the three countries. The Western Balkans leaders are “*building the Balkans for the 21st century, a region of stability and prosperity,*” said Zaev. The action plan that the three countries’ officials adopted stipulates the non-stop work on borders in order to increase the border permeability with a possibility to cross the borders with IDs only, he added. Zaev also said the goal of the meeting is to enhance regional cooperation and reach the common goal – the EU membership. (www.rs.n1info.com)



Serbia’s President Aleksandar Vucic, North Macedonia’s Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, and Albania’s Prime Minister Edi Rama during their meeting in Ohrid

(Photo source: www.predsednik.rs)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**   :

*Political parties are organizing their pre-electoral campaigns for the early parliamentary elections scheduled for April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020, while an interim Government is expected to be formed on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020. Undoubtedly, North Macedonia has entered in political uncertainty and instability. Russia is trying to fill in the “political gap” in Western Balkans, but western forces are on alert to prevent it. It should be noted that the dilemma EU opening accession negotiations or Russian influence is not a realistic one since the country has already entered NATO (the process is almost to be concluded) which is a major step towards the full integration into the western security system. Initiative for free movement of goods, people and capital between North Macedonia, Serbia and Albania is considered as a reaction of Western Balkan*



*countries in EU skepticism towards their European integration. It is considered more or less as an ambitious “firework” instead of a realistic and sustainable plan. North Macedonia should focus on reforms regarding justice, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, administration, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process. Besides, North Macedonia’s politics are still shaken by a series of corruption and extortion scandals undermining not only country’s political stability, but also its European perspective. Fancy names such as “Extortion”, “Empire”, “Racket”, “Titanic”, “Monster” are nothing more than scandals involving politicians, businessmen, criminals, and judicial servants demonstrating that corruption, absence of rule of law and non transparency dominate in state’s function.*



**ROMANIA:** November 4<sup>th</sup>, Ludovic Orban’s Cabinet got the Parliament’s approval by 240 votes, despite the Social Democratic Party’s (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) boycott in an attempt the quorum will not be met. The Senate and Chamber Speakers have also boycotted the plenary session, which was chaired by National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) Senator Alina Gorghiu. President Klaus Iohannis has signed the decree to appoint the new Government. *“Thank you for trusting us,”* said Orban after the votes had been counted. The Government needed 233 votes to get the Parliament’s confidence and finally got 240. *“Romania has a legitimate Government despite the pathetic and shameful boycott,”* the Orban said after the vote. Several PRO Romania (PRO România - PRO) MPs and at least 2 from PSD

have also voted in favor of Orban Cabinet, despite the decision of these parties’ leaders to boycott the vote or vote against. *“I thank those MPs from Pro Romania for their attitude. Depending on their decisions, if they stay in Pro Romania or not, they remain our partners,”* Orban said. PRO has been divided in two camps over endorsing the Orban Cabinet, with Chairman Victor Ponta denouncing the move of some *“dissidents,”* Mihai Tudose included, to disobey his order to not vote the Liberal Cabinet. Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România -USR) Chairman, Dan Barna, said the vote they are casting today is *“no blank check”* and warned that USR will sanction *“any potential side slip”* of the new Government. Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR) Chairman, Kelemen Hunor, said in his turn that the Government must allot 6% of GDP to Education. *“If you enforce the laws adopted by the Parliament, if you respect the ratified treaties if you respect us, you will be respected in return,”* Hunor said. Varujan Vosganian said that Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE) had voted the Government because the country needs a budget. He reminded the new Prime Minister about the 12 points required by ALDE within negotiations with PNL, underlining there are many important infrastructure projects, particularly the highway linking Moldova to other regions. Vosganian also recalled the *“so called abuses in justice”* and asked the Government to defend Romania’s sovereignty. Marius Pașcan from People’s Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP) said that *“the country’s stability is more important than anything,”* so PMP is voting the Orban Cabinet. ([www.romaniajournal.ro](http://www.romaniajournal.ro))

- November 7<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Ludovic Orban went to Cotroceni Palace this morning, together with Finance Minister Florin Cițu, and Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu to discuss with President Klaus Iohannis about the disaster found in the national state budget after Social Democratic Party's (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) Government led by Viorica Dancila had been toppled down, but also about the first round of the presidential election on Sunday. The disaster claimed by the Liberal Cabinet, Orban said on Wednesday that PSD had left behind a "hole" of 11 billion Leu in cashes and also arrears of 5 billion Leu on the payments to the Mayors for the local projects under the National Program of Local Development (PNDL). On Thursday, the premier launched the same warning regarding the funds in the healthcare system, announcing there is not enough money in the accounts to close the year, not even to pay salaries. In her turn, Deputy Prime Minister Raluca Turcan said the deficit to the public healthcare fund mounts to 3 billion Leu in the first nine months of 2019. *"There is not enough money to close the year, neither for health programs, nor for the National Health Insurance House's budget,"* Orban said, while Health Minister Victor Costache added there is no money for salaries either. *"There are around 4 billion Leu,"* the Minister said. In her turn, Turcan stated *"We do not want to scare anybody, but the deficit to the national health fund is 3 billion Leu for the first 9 months of the year. The first challenge for the new Minister is to provide a high quality medical care under tough circumstances."* At the same time, PM Orban also voiced concern on the pension fund, saying there is no surplus as the Dancila Government used to say, but it is rather a deficit. Another warning is launched by the new Minister

of EU Funds, who said that Romania risks losing 300 million euro EU funds if they are not used them. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- November 10<sup>th</sup>, 46.84% of voters had cast their votes in the polling stations in Romania on Sunday's presidential election, by 20:00hrs, more precisely 8,537,997 people. Turnout in the urban areas is higher than in the countryside. The incumbent President, running for a second mandate at Cotroceni on behalf of the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) Klaus Iohannis, said on Sunday after casting his vote that he had voted for *"normal Romania."* Social Democratic Party's (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) candidate, former Prime Minister Viorica Dancila stated she had voted for *"a Romania of welfare and guaranteed rights."* Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR) Chairman Dan Barna, the candidate of the USR-PLUS Alliance, stated he had voted for a change and that he was very optimistic about the result. People's Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară - PMP) candidate, Theodor Paleologu said that he had voted for a *"Romania of respect."* Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR) national leader and presidential candidate Kelemen Hunor voted at Carta, Harghita County, saying he voted for Romania's future, for respect and for trust. Prime Minister Ludovic Orban urged Romanians to come to polls, underscoring that it is a fundamental right for every Romanian to decide what where the country should be heading to. (www.romanianjournal.ro)

**COUNTRY ASSESSMENT**   :

Romania got a PNL interim Government with its leader, Ludovik Orban as the new Prime Minister. In the meanwhile, the first round of presidential election took place on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019. It seems that the current President Klaus Iohannis is in the first place of the first round of the election. If Iohannis will be re-elected then the liberals (PNL) will fully control Romanian politics. However, the new Government will be a weak minority Government and it is doubtful if it will achieve to handle serious state's issues such as the 2020 budget. Elections should not be expected before spring 2020, giving the necessary time to PSD to be reorganized and even to take in advantage a possible wear of ruling party. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries perceiving it as a threat against its national security. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



**SERBIA:** November 4<sup>th</sup>, according to Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, he discussed with the US Special Envoy for the Balkans Matthew Palmer first face to face, and then a meeting of two delegations was held. *“Talks were open, honest and to be fair to the public, I am also pleased with the content because we have considered all of the disputed issues, all the differences between us, and I would say that we are determined to find solutions in the future that would also mean better US and Serbian relations,”* Vucic said at a press conference after the meeting with Palmer. I would say it was also a constructive approach to resume dialogue with

Pristina as soon as possible, he added. Vucic recalled that the US and Serbia's views on Kosovo differ to great extent, which is no secret. *“The US has recognized Kosovo, Serbia has a different point of view, but I am grateful to Palmer that he was ready to listen and to hear what we have to say today, as well as on earlier occasions,”* Vucic said, and thanked Palmer for the support the US is giving to Serbia on her way to the EU.



Meeting of Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic with the US Special Envoy for Balkans, Matthew Palmer

(Photo source: [www.predsednik.rs](http://www.predsednik.rs))

Answering the questions posed by the press, he also said that Serbia would not enter into the conflict with the US; *“We will not enter into any conflict with America, it would be insane to fight with the greatest force.”* He added that all problems would be resolved by intensifying bilateral relations with the US, while protecting our own interests, not always indulging to the world's most powerful force. *“Palmer told me what he did not like about Serbian politics, he told me that, and I responded to him,”* Vucic said, adding that he expected conditions for the resumption of the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue to be created soon, and that Serbia wanted to regard that dialogue in a responsible and serious way, leading towards solution. *“Serbia is ready for a*

*compromise but is not, and will never be ready, for its own humiliation and disrespect of its people in Kosovo and Metohija, and of the state as a whole,”* the President of Serbia said, underlying that those who think that they can humiliate Serbia and press her to work against its own interests - this is, simply, not possible. Addressing the media after Vucic, Palmer pointed out that he had discussed with Vucic political situation not only in Serbia, but within the region. (www.b92.net)

- November 6<sup>th</sup>, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) said in its latest report that economic growth in the Western Balkans is slowing due to weaker global economic prospects, adding that growth “*disappointed in Serbia.*” “*The EBRD sees economic growth moderating in the Western Balkans region in 2020, on the back of a weaker global economic outlook, along with the economic slowdown of the eurozone,*” a press release said. The EBRD Regional Economic Prospects report said that growth in the Western Balkans was already weak in the first half of 2019 (down by 1% from 2018), with the exceptions of Kosovo and North Macedonia. “*Growth disappointed in Serbia, with weak industrial production; exports from Fiat’s Serbian car plant have been falling. While the region has benefited from foreign direct investments (FDI), the local supplier base remains small, limiting the positive spillovers from FDI to the local economy,*” the report said. “*Economic growth subsided in Serbia during 2019. Unfavorable trends in industrial production continued in the first half of 2019, with industrial output declining by 2% year on year on the back of falling production in mining and manufacturing, while utilities and agricultural*

*output stagnated. As a consequence, the overall GDP growth rate slowed to 2.8% year on year in the first half of 2019, from 4.4% in 2018. The 2019 budget envisages a small deficit (0.5% of GDP), while public debt stood at 54% of GDP at the end of June 2019.”* it said. According to the EBRD inflationary pressure was low thanks in part to a strong exchange rate. “*Inflation initially picked up in 2019, reaching 3.0% year on year in April, but then fell back to 1.1% in September, undershooting the lower bound of the central bank’s target band (3 ± 1.5%). After keeping the policy rate unchanged at 3.0% for more than a year, the Central Bank cut the rate again in the third quarter of 2019, to 2.5%.*” the report said. The report authors expect Serbia’s GDP to expand by 3.2% in 2019 and 3.5% in 2020. “*Domestic demand should remain the main growth driver, while net exports are most likely to continue their negative contribution. The economic slowdown of the main trading partner, the EU, and the slow pace of reforms within the country might act as a drag on growth in the near term and make it more volatile,*” the EBRD said. Report said that there are no reliable assessments of the effects of the 100% tariffs on Serbian goods that the Kosovo authorities imposed but added that the negative effect on the Serbian economy could stand as high as 400 million euro. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- November 8<sup>th</sup>, Ivica Dacic, Serbia’s Foreign Minister, said on Friday he had a fair and good meeting with Thomas Zarzecki, who heads the US State Department’s Task Force 231, and that Washington would not punish Serbia for violating sanctions against Russia by buying arms from that country, the FoNet news agency reported. According to Dacic, Zarzecki was satisfied with what he was told and added that “*we have nothing*

to hide.” “He (Zarzecki) estimates if a person, company or country should be under sanctions. It is not a spectacular visit, he had already toured 60 states,” Dacic said. He added that the main message he passed on Zarzecki was that Serbia wanted an open relationship and had no intention whatsoever to enter a conflict with the US. (www.rs.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension continues in Serbia with opposition persistently refusing dialogue with ruling SNS. A series of rather minor incidents (thrown of leaflets outside the NI broadcast station, tension outside the state RTS etc) shows an escalation of tension. It is assessed that opposition is hardening its stance seeking to create conditions of abnormality in the state emphasizing that the current Government is not able to handle situation. Potential boycott of the elections by opposition will affect Serbia's political stability, economic growth, and its European process. Close approach of Serbia and Russia especially in the defense and security sector (but also in economic field after the agreement signed by Serbia with EAEU) raise concerns of the US. A possible purchase and deployment of anti-aircraft missile system S-300 and S-400 in the heart of Southeastern Europe could be a “red line” for the US and NATO. Regarding Kosovo, Serbia is waiting to see initiatives and actions of the new Government which will be formed (most likely) with Vetevendosje leader, Albin Kurti as the Prime Minister. Kurti's statements so far (exclusion of Serbian List party from the Government, unification with Albania, full control of Kosovo north by Kosovo institutions) are not encouraging signs and may destabilize the region. A possible

deployment and permanent presence of Kosovo security forces in Serb majority north Kosovo would bring tension and turbulence. However, the US and EU are increasing pressure on both sides to restart dialogue. According to information the US mainly seek to forward talks between the two parties before the Serbian elections on spring 2020 but it is very unlikely to see this happens. Serbia insists that taxes should be revoked for joining dialogue. US special envoy on Balkans, Matthew Palmer keeps a hardline towards Serbia (no EU without resolution of Kosovo issue). Tension remains between Kosovo and Serbia and none could predict Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation including) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state.



**SLOVENIA:** November 4<sup>th</sup>, the Slovenian and Italian Police forces will further enhance cooperation in fighting illegal migrations, as the number of joint Police patrols, launched on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 will be doubled from four to eight, the General Police Department told STA. This was agreed in Trieste on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Seven units will be patrolling the border in the area of the Koper Police Department in the south-west of Slovenia and one in the area of the Nova Gorica Police Department further north on the Slovenian-Italian border. The two countries' Police forces also agreed to exchange information

more promptly to allow for more flexible planning of joint policing of the border, the Slovenian Police also said. (www.sta.si)

- November 5<sup>th</sup>, Karel Holec has been elected the new President of one of the two Slovenian minority umbrella organizations in Hungary, taking over from Martin Roposa, who has led the State Slovenian Self-Government organization since its establishment in 1995, public broadcaster TV Slovenija reported on Tuesday. Holec is a journalist and photographer for the Porabje weekly, the only Slovenian-language paper in Hungary, which was launched in 1991. From 1994 to 2006, he was Mayor of Orfalu, or Andovci in Slovenian. The new leader said he would continue with the minority's main project - efforts to develop the Raba Valley (Porabje) to enable young people to stay in the region. The minority organization is seated in the town of Felsoszolnok (Gornji Senik) and has a unit in Budapest. Roposa will from now on serve as its Vice President. Earlier this year, the other umbrella minority organization in Hungary also got a new leader. In May, Andrea Kovac replaced Joze Hirnok at the helm of the Association of Slovenians in Hungary after he led the organization from its establishment in 1990. The association is based in the town of Szentgotthard (Monoster). There are some 5,000 Slovenians living in Hungary, of whom some 3,000 in the Raba Valley area along the border with Slovenia. (www.sta.si)

- November 6<sup>th</sup>, opposition Left (Levica) declared on Wednesday that its partnership with the minority Government was over after the ruling coalition made its support for a key Left-sponsored bill conditional on adoption of their amendments. Despite the turn, Prime Minister

Marjan Sarec and the coalition are adamant to serve out their term. *"The final domino has fallen, we find the Government has unequivocally broken off cooperation and pulled out from the agreement with us,"* the Left's leader Luka Mesec said after debate on the party's bill to scrap top-up health insurance was suspended with the coalition announcing several amendments. The coalition *"ran over"* the Left-sponsored bill through its amendments, said Mesec, adding that as of this point the agreement with the Government was no longer binding on the Left, which from now on was fully in opposition. However, Prime Minister Marjan Sarec said it was not the Government, but rather the Left which was quitting the partnership. He was determined to complete his term in office, but said this would not be possible without compromising. The Left would like to abolish top-up health insurance collected by private insurance companies and needed for virtually all health services by folding it into mandatory health contributions, at different rates, depending on the individual's income. Apart from the latest bill, Mesec also listed his party's grievances about the reform of the personal income tax which the party says favors the rich, end of bonuses for social benefit recipients who work and the budget, which he described as neither social nor development-oriented. He said the Left was not trying to bring down the Marjan Sarec Government. *"We have merely ascertained that the Government has resigned from the agreement it struck with the Left, which is clear in all the mentioned cases,"* Mesec said. The Left would like to continue to cooperate with the Government, but *"the problem is that we have been ignored for several months,"* he concluded. Mesec would not answer concretely when asked whether the party might now bring a motion of no

confidence. Without formal support from the Left, Sarec said the Government had to seek support for each project and law outside the coalition anyway, and he expects other parties to support the Government proposals they agree with, so he said that “*I do not see need to sign agreements*” with some other opposition party. The opposition Slovenian National Party (Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka - SNS) announced before it would provide the needed support to pass the budget, but Sarec would not say his Government depended on the party's votes, “*we depend on all MPs' votes,*” he said. List of Marjan Sarec (Lista Marjana Šarca - LMS) Deputy Group leader Brane Golubovic does not think the decision would change much. “*The Government will still be stable and the coalition would continue stable,*” he said, expecting cooperation on some projects to continue with the Left, including abolishment of top-up insurance. (www.sta.si)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*The Left party withdrew its support towards the minority Government of Marjan Sarec raising concerns over political stability in the country. Although the Prime Minister is reassuring for the Government's stability and sustainability there are questions over its effectiveness. The possibility of snap elections is rather unlikely, however it is not certain what will happen when the Government bases its viability on opposition support. Ruling coalition parties and opposition make their political calculations which will signal their further actions. As the prime Minister said a lot of compromise is needed. Opposition SNS (and NSi) offered their parliamentary support in the Government. Slovenia – Croatia relations may be tested in coming period due to the latter's effort to*

*join the Schengen Zone. Slovenia appears determined to play the “Schengen Zone card” in order to push Croatia to implement the ruling arbitration regarding the Piran Bay dispute, but it is not sure if it will insist until the end of the process. It might Slovenia be isolated by the other member states; it is not an easy way to veto in EU institutions. It should be underlined that relations between Croatia and Slovenia are in low level and an “underworld war” is ongoing (at political, diplomatic and intelligence context) due to the two countries border dispute. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed military force to support Police tasks. Local communities and municipal authorities in the border with Croatia call for more effective measures against illegal migration. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end. However, the 2020 and 2021 budget foresees increased funding for defense sector.*



**TURKEY:** November 4<sup>th</sup>, Turkey will send captured ISIL members back to their countries, even if their citizenships have been revoked, Minister of Interior Suleyman Soylu said. Soylu on Monday hit out at European countries, saying they were creating “*a new form*

of international law” by demanding that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) prisoners be tried where they were caught. He said Turkey had nearly 1,200 foreign members of ISIL in custody and had captured 287 during its recent operation in northeast Syria aimed at clearing the border region from Kurdish fighters it considers “terrorists.” “We will send back those in our hands, but the world has come up with a new method now; revoking their citizenships,” Soyly said. “They are saying they should be tried where they have been caught. This is a new form of international law, I guess,” he added. “It is not possible to accept this. We will send back DAESH [ISIL] members in our hands to their own countries whether they revoke their citizenships or not,” he concluded. The Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) kept thousands of ISIL members in jails across northeast Syria. Western countries have often refused to accept the repatriation of citizens who left to join ISIL in Syria and have stripped many of their citizenship. Turkey has repeatedly called on European countries to take back their citizens fighting for the group and has accused the SDF of releasing ISIL prisoners amid the recent offensive. Soyly said on Monday recaptured foreign nationals would be taken to prisons or camps in Turkish-controlled zones in northern Syria, including in Jarablus, al-Bab, Azaz and Afrin. (www.aljazeera.com)

- November 6<sup>th</sup>, Turkey will not allow any violation of the (so-called) “*Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus*” (TRNC) rights and sees political equality as a prerequisite to a solution on Cyprus, Vice President Fuat Oktay said Tuesday. He stressed that peace cannot be established according to the principle of the minority. “There

are hydrocarbon sources [in Cyprus]. Why do you think the region attracts attention? If there are two people on the island, then there needs to be a fair sharing.” Turkey has repeatedly voiced that it will continue to take the necessary measures to protect the rights and interests of the Turkish Cypriots, especially on the hydrocarbon resources which are unilaterally claimed by the Greek part of the island. Speaking to a group of young Turkish Cypriots in the capital Ankara, Oktay said “You have to determine your own future. This prosperity belongs to everyone living on the island and has to be distributed equally.” He underlined that “this homeland [Turkey] of 780,000 square kilometers is also yours,” indicating that Turkey is also home to the Turkish Cypriots. Advising the youngsters to take part in politics and display a strong stance to solve the problems of both Turkey and the “TRNC”, Oktay said the youth will strongly contribute to creating future ties between the two countries. The “TRNC”, established in 1983 on the northern one-third of the island, is only recognized by Turkey and faces a longstanding embargo in commerce, transportation and culture. Meanwhile, the Greek Cypriot Administration enjoys recognition by the international community as the Republic of Cyprus, established in 1960, and is a member of the EU. The decades since have seen several attempts to resolve the Cyprus dispute, all failing. The latest one, held with the participation of the guarantor countries –Turkey, Greece, and the UK – ended in 2017 in Switzerland. (www.dailysabah.com)

- November 7<sup>th</sup>, Turkish state organizations have been carrying out significant projects in Africa and contribute to good relations with the countries on the continent, a ruling party official said



Thursday. *“Turkey is now a significant stakeholder in Africa with the Maarif Foundation, TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), Yunus Emre Institute, THY (Turkish Airlines) and the business world,”* ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) Deputy Chairman Cevdet Yılmaz said. AKP Deputies visited South Africa following the understanding of memorandum signed between AKP and South Africa's ruling African National Council (ANC) in August. *“This dialogue that we established in South Africa with the ANC will improve our bilateral relations, contribute to the works of our institutions there and contribute to our relations with other countries in southern Africa,”* Yılmaz told Anadolu Agency (AA) regarding his visit. Yılmaz said the threat of the Gulenist Terror Group (FETO) was emphasized during the visit, adding *“This is not only a threat to Turkey but a security threat to all countries where it operates. We underline everywhere we go that, beside some obvious figures, their links especially have to be investigated. These are countries that have gone through a period of colonialism, countries that have been exploited for their resources by some international powers. We have stressed that the same powers today try to control and destabilize these countries with other instruments.”* Over the last 20 years, in line with its multidimensional foreign policy, Turkey has been pursuing a more active opening-up policy toward many regions. Until the 1990s, Turkey's foreign policy was limited to the borders of NATO in the Western world. Since the 2000s, however, Turkey has embraced a new foreign policy strategy as a result of questioning and redefining its position in the global order. This new strategy has diversified Turkey's foreign policy alternatives with a more

independent stance and a strategy in the direction of its national interests. For Africa, Turkey declared 2005 the African year and accelerated the pace of its ties with the countries on the continent. (www.dailysabah.com)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** ■ :

*Turkey and Russia implement the agreement on Syrian “safe zone” ensuring a relative truce in the region. Turkish leadership appears satisfied with the final results of the operation “Peace Spring.” Undoubtedly, Turkey was one of the winners in Syrian conflict. It achieved to establish a 32 kilometers “safe zone” and to force Syrian Kurds to withdraw their forces from an area of 120 kilometers in Turkish – Syrian borders. In other words, Syrian Kurds are no longer a threat to Turkish security since they are not able anymore to conduct and support operations within the Turkish soil. The Turkish plan will be concluded by relocation of almost 2 million Syrian refugees within the “safe zone” diversifying population’s composition in north Syria. Turkey continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists and thousands of citizens 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. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major*

*security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. In Eastern Mediterranean Turkey continues to dispute Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by keep violating it repeatedly. Moreover, it raises tension with Greece and Cyprus by announcing several naval exercises with real fires in the Aegean Sea and within Cypriot EEZ. It seems that Turkish strategic plans are targeting the maritime area around the island of Kastelorizo, southeast of the Aegean Sea. Turkey is determined to protect its interests and would not hesitate to use force against Cyprus or Greece. With zero cost so far Turkey achieved not only to consolidate a situation in which Turkish drill ships could enter within Cypriot EEZ whenever they wish accompanied by Turkish navy vessels, but also to put the hydrocarbon issue on the table of negotiations, to force oil and gas companies to reconsider their engagement in a sea which is not stable and secure, and to directly question the Cypriot sovereignty. So far, so good for a country which exercise a multilateral foreign policy and is engaged in several ongoing armed conflicts. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will set the base to become a regional military super power.*


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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.*