

OCTOBER 22 - 28, 2018 –VOL. 2 - ISSUE 1



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE TO THOSE WHO SHAPE THE FUTURE

“SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE” is a weekly review of the most significant current political, economic, energy, defense, and security news of Southeastern Europe. It covers 14 countries; Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. However Greece enjoys its own weekly review for a more detailed presentation of its current affairs (GREECE AT A GLANCE).

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

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ALBANIA: October 22nd, Mesila

Doda, General Secretary of the Party for Justice, Integrity and Unity (Partia Drejtësi, Integrim dhe Unitet – PDIU) announced that it will file a request at the Prosecution for investigating the money that Greece supposedly uses to buy politicians in Albania. *“Purpose of these funds is to buy politicians and policies. That’s why they need to be investigated. We will file all acts to start an investigation at the Prosecution of Tirana,”* Doda said. She added that it is known yet what the Greek Government means with the announcement that maritime borders will be extended from 6 to 12 miles. *“They asked for a Greek cemetery, they got it. We agreed for the names of locations in Albanian passports. Now we have an agreement for the minorities as well. The Albanian Government has not taken anything. This agreement is not based on equal grounds,”* Doda said. (www.top-channel.tv)

- October 25th, speaking at the George Marshall Center in Germany, the Albanian President, Ilir Meta, said that the Balkan issue is still unresolved. He stated that the recent proposal for a new debate on what should be the final agreement between Kosovo and Albania consumes a lot of energy on wrong objectives. The debate in question is about Kosovo’s border correction with Serbia. *“The recent proposal for a new debate on a final agreement for normalizing the relations between Kosovo and Serbia is consuming a lot of energy on the wrong objectives. It doesn’t consolidate and doesn’t bring peace to the region. Opening such a debate when there are so many red flags from the EU and the USA, is alarming,”* Meta said. Albanian President was guest of honor at the George Marshall European Center in Garmish, Germany

speaking about security and Euro-Altnatic integration in the Balkans. According to him NATO enlargement and a coherent cooperation of the EU would be the keys for region’s stability. (www.top-channel.tv)

- October 27th, Albania’s Minister of Interior Fatmir Xhafaj handed in his resignation from office to Prime Minister Edi Rama. Rama himself made the news public through social media, adding General Sander Lleshi will take Xhafaj’s post. *“I accepted the resignation of Minister Xhafaj, whom I thank for his valuable contribution. General Sander Lleshi will bring new positive energy as the head of interior affairs. The track has been paved. Now we need to increase the speed and achieve even more meaningful results,”* Rama wrote. Head of the opposition’s Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) Lulzim Basha wrote in social networks that *“Fatmir Xhafaj was the only Interior Minister in Europe with a drug trafficker brother,”* and that his resignation *“is an important step in our battle to clear up politics from crime.”* In the same context, the opposition has also demanded Rama’s resignation for his alleged ties with crime. Xhafaj’s resignation comes at an interesting time, as the Albanian Police has been overseeing a number of operations aiming to capture the country’s most notorious criminal rings. An official reason behind Xhafaj’s resignation is yet to be given, although he has been the target of numerous opposition attacks, particularly regarding the alleged protection of his brother, Agron, who used to be part of a narcotics trafficking ring in Italy. The accusations towards Xhafaj began with the surfacing of the “Babale case,” in which Albert Veliu, former collaborator of Agron, claimed he recently spoke with Agron to help him traffic

narcotics for some quick money. Both Xhafaj and Rama have denied the veracity of this audio-surveillance, while the country's prosecution is investigating the case and has already issued two arrest warrants against Veliu and the man who impersonated Agron. However, the "Babale case" investigations also made clear the fact that Agron's sentence years back was eased significantly by saving him from some extra years in prison. Following the case breakout, Agron left to Italy to serve his sentence. Xhafaj is one of the Socialist Party's main politicians, a lawmaker and Minister for several mandates, and Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee of the judicial reform. Along the vetting of judiciary, he devised the vetting process for the state Police, while he was leading the "Force of Law" operation for many months. Xhafaj had also criticized several times his predecessor Saimir Tahiri, who is also under fire for possible ties with criminal rings in the country due to the criminal records of his relatives in neighboring Italy. (www.tiranatimes.com)



Former Minister of Interior Fatmir Xhafaj
(Photo source: www. kryeministria.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Resignation of Interior Minister Xhafaj brought a governmental and political crisis in Albania. Although there are a lot who claim that his resignation will release the Government from a burden due to Xhafaj's links with organized crime, it is assessed that his resignation will be followed by new actions and incidents against Rama' Government causing rapid political developments. The main conclusion is that corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state's problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU next year. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Opposition launches strong accusations against the Government and Edi Rama for having close relations with organized crime raising questions over the power of "Albanian mafia" in the country and its influence in state's politics. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a "mother nation". It is estimated that Albania will fully comply with the EU and U.S "line" for territorial exchanges or border changes between Serbia and Kosovo if it is necessary for a mutual accepted solution. Albania maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and F.Y.R.O.M. Possible border changes may engage Albania in dangerous situations taking into consideration that it has the role of "protector" of Albanians in the region. Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA: October 22nd, leader of Bosnia's Croat Democratic Union

(Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH) Dragan Covic met with the newly elected Serb member of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency and leader of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrataor - SNSD) Milorad Dodik where they discussed plans for a possible coalition. On the other hand, current Chairman of Bosnia's Presidency, Bakir Izetbegovic, discussed the situation in the country following the October 7th, 2018 general election with the Head of the EU Delegation to Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H), Lars-Gunnar Wigemark. Izetbegovic said everybody should work toward forming new Governments as soon as possible in order to ensure the country's stability and progress. It is necessary to form a wide coalition of winning parties which would implement necessary reforms and accelerate the country's path toward NATO and the EU, Izetbegovic said. He added that reforms addressing stabilization, the fight against corruption, building infrastructure and defining a special program for keeping youth in Bosnia should be prioritized. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- October 24th, the border crossing with Croatia in the northwest of Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) has been closed after a group of migrants, who spent the night in the border crossing area, broke the first of two Police cordons. Some two hundred of migrants who stayed over the past months in an improvised tent camp near the northwestern Bosnian town of Velika Kladusa, only a few kilometres away from the border with Croatia, came to the Maljevac border crossing on October 23rd, 2018 insisting that the border is open so they could continue their journey to the EU countries. After spending the night in open, where they were surrounded by the police, the migrant started exerting pressure in the morning and eventually

broke through the first cordon of the border Police officers, which led to the closing of the border crossing. Meanwhile, a group of migrants who arrived on October 23rd, 2018 late evening in Bihac, about 50 kilometres away from Velika Kladusa, were stuck in the train as the Police prevented them from leaving the coaches. B&H's Security Minister Dragan Mektic said on October 23rd, 2018 that the Police was instructed to stop the further arrival of migrants in the Una-Sana Canton (USC), where Velika Kladusa and Bihac are located. The order followed after the local population held a series of protests demanding from the state authorities to limit the movement of migrants and solve their accommodation issue. This northwestern Bosnian region has become a hotspot for migrants who had entered the country through its eastern borders in the attempt to reach the European Union, their final destination. Although it is hard to assess the exact number of migrants in the Una-Sana Canton, due to their constant movement, the local institutions claim there are more than 10,000. USC Police Commissioner, Mujo Koricic, told in a press conference that a further influx of migrants in the region would mean a further threat to security. *"It is the fact that the migrants are on daily basis committing numerous criminal offences, burglaries, raping, robberies. We won't give up on these measures,"* Koricic said. According to N1's reporter, buses have been sent for transferring the migrants back to Sarajevo. According to Koricic, migrants who used bus transportation to reach Bihac were stopped in the town of Kljuc, about 100 kilometres away from Bihac, and sent back to Sarajevo. *"The law on internal affairs is clear. The Police Commissioner is the one in charge of the state of security,"* he underlined. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- October 25th, blocking the implementation of the election results in Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) and keeping the future of this country a hostage is not an option, said top international institutions in the country commenting on the recent statements of the Croat leader Dragan Covic. *“It is on Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions at all levels to find a solution that would enable the uninterrupted and swift formation of the new Government. No political party should be blocking the implementation of the election results,”* said the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the international community's authority overseeing the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) which ended the 1992-95 armed conflict in Bosnia. Dragan Covic, the leader of the Croat Democratic Union ((Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH)) and outgoing Croat member of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency, earlier told media the conditions to implement the election results have not been met as the Election Law changes have not been adopted. *“I am deeply convinced the Constitutional Court's decision which tells that the Parliament must conduct the changes to the Law election, which would enable legitimate representation at all levels, must be implemented,”* Covic said. He was referred to the ruling in a case submitted by Bosnian Croat politician Bozo Ljubic, who had argued that the Croat influence in cantons with a majority of Bosniak population was unfairly diminished in the selection of delegates and that it allows Bosniaks to elect the Croat member of the Presidency. The US Embassy in B&H objected any situation in which the formation of authorities would be blocked and urged the political actors not to block the country. On October 23rd, 2018, the Croatian National Assembly (Hrvatski Narodni Sabor - HNS), an organization which

coordinates political and cultural activities of Croat parties in B&H, chaired by Covic, decided the conditions for the formation of the government following the October 7th, 2018 general election have not been met because the voting took place in line with an unconstitutional election law. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. It is under question if the general election held on October 7th, 2018 will bring political stability in the country. It is estimated that formation of Government would be a very difficult issue. Croats do not accept the electoral results claiming that Croatian community did not elect its representative in the tripartite presidency. There is a feeling of injustice among Croat people which actually forced Croatia's Prime Minister to set the problem in his EU counterparts. Election of ultra nationalist Serb Milorad Dodik in the tripartite Presidency is a strong sign of more nationalistic rhetoric and more obstacles towards Bosnia's EU and NATO integration. Dodik is a person who does not believe in B&H viability and is expected to promote his own political agenda. RS rhetoric for greater autonomy remains active and the current debate on border change and territorial exchanges between Serbia and Kosovo developed Serbian entity's "taste" for its case. More and more "voices" express concern over Russian influence in the Serbian entity not excluding security irregularities. Bosnia has become a field of influence's rivalry; Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Russia approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious

groups according to their interests. Major concerns over security situation and political stability in the state.



BULGARIA: October 22nd, the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense announced that Special Forces of the nine member states participating in the Bucharest 9 Initiative (B-9) have started the multinational military drill “Thracian Sword – 2018” at the Novo Selo Training Area. The exercise was held until October 26th, 2018 with the participation of up to 200 servicemen of the Special Operation Forces from the Southeast Europe B-9 members, including Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Serbia, Romania, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina, F.Y.R.O.M, and Albania. This year’s multinational joint training is conducted with the support of the U.S. Army Aviation. Bulgaria joined the exercise with its 68th Special Operations Brigade. The Brigade has deep training ties with similar foreign forces, such as the US Army's 10th Special Operations Group, Portuguese Special Forces Brigade in Lamego, Greek and Romanian Special Forces, Serbian Special Operations Brigade etc. The Brigade has renewed its weapons (of mostly Heckler & Koch and Barrett manufacture, but also relying heavily on Bulgarian manufactured weapons), special equipment and mobility inventory (Mercedes-Benz Zetros, Actros, Unimog and G-Wagen, HMMWV etc.). It is fully compatible with NATO operational standards and procedures and its Alpha Task Force Detachment is attached to the NATO Quick Reaction Forces. The exact structure is not publicly known, but it is around 1,500 servicemen. Since February 1st, 2017 it is directly subordinated to the Chief of Defense It is one of two Bulgarian military Special Operations

units. The other one is the much smaller Naval Special Reconnaissance Detachment (MCPO), which is a navy “seals” unit included within the structure of the Bulgarian Navy. (www.novinite.com)

- October 24th, the Parliament voted down a motion of no-confidence against Prime Minister Boyko Borissov’s Government over its healthcare policy. The motion was rejected with 133 votes against, 99 votes for and no abstentions. According to the Parliament rules, a motion of confidence on the same grounds can be tabled no sooner than six months after the previous vote. The motion was tabled on October 15th, 2018 by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP). The arguments of the opposition Socialists were divided in three parts: the state of the healthcare sector, the proposed reforms in the system and the BSP’s alternative. This is the third motion of no confidence in the Borissov’s cabinet. The previous two, over corruption and security, also failed. Nevertheless, BSP’s leader Kornelia Ninova announced that her party starts preparation for early parliamentary elections. According to Ninova, the Prime Minister Boyko Borissov cannot control the situation in the country anymore. *“For the first time, he seems to me helpless as Prime Minister to solve the problem. Yesterday he transferred it to Karakachanov, the day before to Volen Siderov. When your state is in such a crisis, when the society is so brash, it does not look good to be helpless and show frustration that you cannot handle this situation. BSP from now on starts a rapid organization in preparation for early elections,”* Ninova said. (www.novinite.com)

- October 25th, the Bulgarian Government has removed Deputy Prime Minister Valeri Simeonov as Head of the Cabinet's National Council for Co-operation on Ethnic and Integration Issues, replacing him with Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev. The move was proposed by the Prime Minister Boiko Borissov, according to a Government statement, which gave no reasons for the decision. Simeonov has been mired in controversy in recent days, with calls for his resignation as Deputy Prime Minister over his comments about protesting mothers of children with disabilities. Under pressure from coalition partners, Simeonov, who for days had said he would not apologize for his comments, issued an apology on October 24th, 2018. Simeonov, a co-leader of coalition Government minority partner the United Patriots – a grouping of far-right, ultra-nationalist parties that lately has been caught up in faction fighting – is amid new controversy, over draft legislation that would make him the Head of the National Council for Integration of People with Disabilities. The draft law was approved at first reading by the National Assembly's Social Policy Committee on October 24th, 2018. Anton Kutev, of the opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (Българска социалистическа партия - BSP), said that the proposal to appoint Simeonov to the post “*sounds almost like a joke, but the truth is the law was written long before the scandal around Valeri Simeonov broke.*” Kutev said that the problem was not the law itself, because it would be good to have the council headed at Deputy Prime Minister level, but that “*a bad candidate*” namely Simeonov would get the job. Hassan Ademov, of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi - DPS), said that his party would propose the post to be given to the Minister of Labour and Social Policy Biser

Petkov as it has been the case up to now. In the current situation, the proposal to appoint Simeonov to the post was scandalous, Ademov said. Svetlana Angelova, of Borissov's Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) party, said: “*I think there is no drama and after consultation, after discussion, this text can be changed.*” Earlier, on October 22nd, 2018 the Prime Minister Boyko Borisov said that he would not force United Patriots co-leader Valeri Simeonov to resign as Deputy Prime Minister because that would “*ruin the whole structure*” and bring down the Government. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bulgaria maintains relative political stability although ruling coalition faces several challenges threaten its sustainability. President Radev strengthens his rhetoric and criticism against the Government (and the Prime Minister Borissov) highlighting their different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Although partners of the ruling coalition “United Patriots” try to overcome their disputes and show “good behavior” a new crisis has emerged within their coalition maintaining scenarios of snap elections. Finally, opposition BSP tries to push further Borisov and his Government by strengthening its rhetoric and tabling a new motion of no confidence. However, there is little possibility of Government's collapse and early parliamentary elections. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Although modernization of

Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc) military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: October 23rd, some 400 migrants and refugees gathered on Bosnia & Herzegovina's (B&H) border with Croatia, with a similar number massing on Serbia's border with Croatia. Croatian Police announced that misinformation had been spread that Croatia (namely an EU state) would open its borders. *“Among the migrant populations on the territory of Bosnia and Serbia, false information is spreading that the Republic of Croatia will allow their entry into its territory as well as further passage to the countries of Western Europe,”* a Police statement said. Local Police and members of Bosnia's border force were deployed to the Maljevac border crossing in northern B&H, where several hundred migrants and refugees hoped to cross over into Croatia, but the situation remained calm with no incidents reported. A few hundred also gathered at the Batrovci border crossing between Serbia and Croatia, near the town of Sid, also hoping to get into the EU country. According to Serbian media, the migrants and refugees came from the Adasevci and Principovci camps. Later reports from local media suggested that some migrants and refugees have already been returning to the camps. On October 22nd, 2018, a group of some 100 migrants and refugees arrived at Bosnia's Izacic border crossing and spent all night in the open, but they have since been returned to migrant centres in Bihac and Velika Kladusa, Sanela Dujkovic, a spokeswoman for the

Bosnian Border Police told local media. According to estimates from the UN refugee agency UNHCR, the number of refugees and migrants in Serbia in October was about 3,900, of whom about 3,400 were housed in state-owned asylum centers and reception centers, including around 200 accommodated in tents in Principovac and Adasevci. In B&H from the beginning of the year to October 2017, just over 18,000 migrants and refugees were registered on the new so-called *“Balkan route,”* which passes through Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and in some instances Serbia. According to the Bosnian Service for Foreign Affairs a total of 6,411 of the migrants came from Pakistan. Others came from Iran (2,944), Syria (2,533), Afghanistan (2,962), and Iraq (1,675). (www.balkaninsight.com)

- October 25th, Croatian army troops are taking part in NATO's military exercise “Trident Juncture – 18”, which is being held in Norway until November 7th, 2018, the Croatian Defense Ministry said in a press release. The exercise involves about 50,000 troops from the 29 NATO member-states, plus two partner countries: Finland and Sweden. In the exercise, NATO's largest since 2002, 25 Croatian soldiers are taking part, providing communication support. “Trident Juncture – 18” is one of the several high-profile military exercises, which the Alliance decided to organize at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014. The first edition of this exercise was held in 2015, in Portugal and Spain. It consists of three main phases – a deployment phase, a live field exercise, and, finally, a command post exercise. Some 10,000 vehicles, 250 aircraft and 65 vessels will be used during the exercise, under the command of Admiral James G. Foggo III, United States Navy admiral currently serving as commander of US Naval Forces Europe. “Trident Juncture – 18”

is expected to test NATO's ability to train and operate together in the northern parts of the NATO area. It will also test the alliance's ability to operate in cold weather and difficult terrain. (www.hr.nlinfo.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

In a time period that nationalism rises in Southeastern Europe and some “circles” promote border changes in the region, Croatia shows its military strength by conducting large national military exercises and by joining NATO exercises. On the other hand, it follows a tough external policy with neighboring countries. Croatia has territorial disputes with Slovenia and Bosnia while it does not hesitate to intervene in Bosnia’s internal affairs in the name of Croatian entity living there. It is more than obvious that Croatia tries to establish a leading role in Western Balkans not only as an EU and NATO member state but also as a rising “local” power. However, it is estimated that political distance between the President and Government may affect political stability of the state. Ruling coalition claims political stability. Border dispute on Piran Bay remains active and Slovenia’s initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. It is still a question how Croatia will react. Apart from that a new border conflict has emerged with Bosnia & Herzegovina regarding Peljesak Bridge. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces’ modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: October 23rd, despite expectations, President Nicos Anastasiades did not table a detailed proposal on ‘loose’ federation as form of settling the island’s division at the National Council and he did not give clear answers on the essence of the matter, main opposition Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού - ΑΚΕΛ) leader Andros Kyprianou said. It had been widely expected that Anastasiades would be clarifying his suggestion to reflect on the possibility of having a decentralized federal system as a form of administration post-solution, a departure from the Greek Cypriot side’s long-standing positions supporting a strong federal Government. Government spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said there had been a misunderstanding since there was no plan to table a proposal as such, but to have discussion and reflection. He said the aim was to discuss the potential of reinforcing the functionality of the sought settlement through devolution but there was no question of submitting a comprehensive proposal. Speaking after the national council meeting, Kyprianou said the President submitted various documents but in no way were they a proposal. The documents concerned the divergences achieved regarding the powers of the central Government during the talks. “*There is confusion about what exactly the president means and we want to hear his specific proposal so as to know what he is really saying,*” Kyprianou said. “*We haven’t heard a specific proposal from the President. We asked but got no response in my view, and as regards the substance, we got no response about which powers he wants to grant the constituent entities.*” Democratic Rally (Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός - DISY), Chief Averof Neophytou said that during the four-hour

session he made it clear that efforts to restart the talks should continue *“Inside the parameters of the UN Security Council decisions.”* Democratic Party (Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα - DIKO) demanded a full explanation on the meaning of the term, arguing that its introduction has raised serious questions and deep concerns. In a memo submitted to the National Council, the party said it wanted to know what authorities will be granted to the constituent states and how would disputes be resolved. Was the full withdrawal of the Turkish army provided for by the ‘loose federation’ or would it be up to the Turkish Cypriot state to decide, DIKO asked. It put similar questions related to natural resources, international agreements and citizenship. The Government’s spokesman said there was no magic formula and it was not a matter of arithmetic. *“Indicatively, I should mention, the federal bodies in the central state will be more than 100,”* he said, adding that if the Turkish Cypriot side must give a positive vote, then there will be an issue of rigidity. *“This is a concern,”* he said. Asked what Anastasiades would tell Akinci if he asked during their meeting on October 26th, 2018, Prodromou said he hoped the Turkish Cypriot leader was prepared to talk Cyprus problem. Prodromou said the reason for the stalemate was the Turkish side’s refusal to seriously discuss guarantees and occupying forces. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- October 24th, the Government said it would not be dragged into the game of tension played by Turkey, as Ankara warned it would not allow any activity in the eastern Mediterranean without its involvement. Government spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said Turkey is trying to create an atmosphere of tension in the region but Cyprus will not be dragged into it and will continue to

implement its energy policies based on international law. *“Many of the actions carried out by Turkey are illegal, (and) in violation of international law, but by no means will we join this artificial climate of tension that wants to give the false impression of the existence of differences or disputes,”* Prodromou said. *“There is no dispute in the seas of Cyprus; the Republic of Cyprus has an Exclusive Economic Zone that is internationally recognized by the Law of the Sea and other states.”* Earlier, the Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said Ankara will not allow Greece to interfere in its activities in the eastern Mediterranean, a few days after the country complained that a Greek frigate had harassed a Turkish energy exploration ship in the region. The issue of energy exploration in the region, along with a dispute over Greece’s maritime borders, has revived tensions between the NATO allies who are separated by the Aegean Sea. Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus have overlapping claims of jurisdiction for offshore oil and gas research in the eastern Mediterranean. *“Our warships are providing the necessary protection in the region. We will never tolerate new harassment,”* Akar said. He claimed no project is possible in the eastern Mediterranean without the involvement of Turkey and northern Cyprus. Anadolu reported earlier that the Turkish ship “Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha” was carrying out seismic research in the region last week when it was harassed by a Greek frigate until the Turkish navy intervened. A Greek defense source denied there was an incident but said the Greeks were monitoring the Turkish ship’s activity. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- October 26th, the leaders of the island’s divided communities agreed to open two new crossings next month, it was announced following a meeting in Nicosia. President Nicos Anastasiades

and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci agreed to open the crossings at Dherynia and Lefka on November 12th, 2018, according to a joint statement. The two leaders *“Also had a frank exchange of views on the way forward. They confirmed their readiness to engage constructively with Ms Jane Holl Lute, who will be visiting the island on October 31st, 2018,”* the statement added. The two leaders were hosted by Deputy Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus Elizabeth Spehar at the Chief of Mission Residence in the United Nations Protected Area. The latest round of UN-sponsored peace talks held in July 2017 at the Swiss resort of Crans-Montana ended inconclusively. After his return from Friday’s meeting, Anastasiades said they could meet again on November 12th, 2018 if there is progress on issues relating to mobile telephony interoperability. The opening of the Dherynia and Lefka crossings as well as the connection of the two side’s mobile telephony systems, among other confidence-building measures (CBM), had been decided by the two leaders back in 2015. Work on the crossings has recently been completed after more than three years but there had not been any concrete progress on the phone issue. Anastasiades said the Turkish Cypriot leader had informed him that finding a solution would be possible. The President said it was a very creative meeting in the sense that the two leaders exchanged views freely. *“There is common will for peace, stability, cooperation on the basis of everything discussed up until today,”* he said. *“We are both waiting for Ms Lute and the proposals she would possibly table to facilitate the resumption of dialogue.”* Anastasiades reaffirmed that the intended solution is of a bizonal, bicomunal federation, provided it generated a functional state. The President said he explained to Akinci that decentralization

would restore Turkish Cypriot trust that the Greek Cypriot majority will not abuse power. On the other hand, it would allay Greek Cypriot concerns that the need for a Turkish Cypriot positive vote will not render the state dysfunctional. Akinci returned from the meeting expressing his satisfaction over the opening of the crossings and because they discussed the island’s future *“and this is good.”* The Turkish Cypriot leader said Anastasiades told him he is not thinking outside the UN parameters nor beyond a bizonal, bicomunal federal solution. Akinci said what is important is to ascertain whether devolution limited the Turkish Cypriot say in a federal partnership, adding that decision-making necessitated both sides participation. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus expresses in highest level its commitment to continue its energy plans exploiting energy resources in Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) despite Turkish aggression. It is estimated that coming days and especially October 29th, 2018 may be a period of high tension while a “hot” security incident should not be excluded. Taking into consideration that Cyprus lacks of military power and especially aeronautical forces it is expected Greece to be engaged more actively in the region. A Greek Navy frigate is already monitoring the Turkish ships. The UN Secretary General appears optimistic for a new round of talks between the two communities. President Anastasiades has spoken for “loose” federation confusing Cypriot political forces but it seems that he steps back from his idea. Solution of bizonal – bicomunal federation is on the table as a base for further talks. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and

Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security.



F.Y.R.O.M: October 25th, Russia rejected the US accusations of having interfered in F.Y.R.O.M's internal affairs. On the contrary, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova claimed that it was Washington which did it. According to her, Moscow is still being accused of meddling in F.Y.R.O.M's internal affairs. She called Matthew Palmer's remarks in Skopje about Russia's involvement 'ridiculous'. *"We would like to note that it was the US, not Russia that on October 19th pressed MPs by blackmail and intimidation ahead in F.Y.R.O.M's Parliament the decision to initiate constitutional changes. The US Ambassador in Skopje was present in the Parliament's building and managed all these processes,"* Sputnik news agency reported. It is not Russia that is against the 'Prespa Agreement', it is F.Y.R.O.M's voters who expressed their will in the September 30th, 2018 referendum, said Zakharova. The US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Palmer has criticized Russia for allegedly meddling in F.Y.R.O.M's processes and urged the ruling majority in Parliament to green light the constitutional changes calling this opportunity 'unique'. (www.mia.mk)

- October 26th, a portion of the draft-constitutional amendments were filed to the Parliament, and the procedure could be launched as of Monday, said MP and Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Социјалдемократски сојуз на Македонија – SDSM) Secretary-General Aleksandar Kiracovski. He explained that the Parliamentary Committees will discuss each

amendment for three days, followed by a plenary session, meaning 2-2.5 months required for the entire process. *"I am convinced all MPs will take part in the debate regarding the amendments and their improvement, so that we all together complete the process that moves the country forward to EU and NATO,"* said Kiracovski. He also expects the establishment of a commission for reconciliation and national unity, urging all MP groups to take part in its composition. *"I hope the opposition will first overcome their own problems, give national interests primary concern and join the commission, so that we all take part in the process of reconciliation and unity, irrespective of the amnesty aspect. There is no amnesty for those who committed severe crimes,"* added Kiracovski. (www.mia.mk)

- October 26th, the eight MPs, who endorsed the constitutional revision, will start operating as independent lawmakers and they will form a new parliamentary caucus. Parliament Speaker Talat Xhaferi said that he had received notices from the eight MPs each saying that in the future in Parliament they would function as independent lawmakers. Also, an official document was submitted to the Parliament's archive notifying that these MPs will form a new parliamentary group. According to MIA news agency MP Elizabeta Kanceska Milevska will most likely coordinate the new caucus. The new caucus in Parliament will be part of the opposition camp, sources say. Its members will join talks on draft-amendments to the Constitution in which they will advocate for the four demands they sent to Parliament before MPs voted for the constitutional changes on October 19th, 2018. The caucus in addition to Kanceska Milevska also includes Emilija Aleksandrova, Krsto Mukoski, Ljuben Arnaudov, Vladanka Avirovic, Saso

Vasilevski, Zekir Ramcilovic and Nola Ismailovska Starova. (www.mia.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Prime Minister Zaev accelerates procedures for constitutional amendments aiming at concluding the whole process successfully. In order to secure the necessary parliamentary majority he has invited opposition to join constitutional changes looking for the most possible consensus. Not only F.Y.R.O.M's future is based on this process, but also Zaev's political future. It is assessed that end of January 2019 F.Y.R.O.M will have finished with its obligations regarding the "Prespes Agreement". It is more than certain that constitutional change will end successfully not only because Zaev fully controls political balance in the Parliament but also because international community namely the US and EU strongly supports F.Y.R.O.M's name change. F.Y.R.O.M has become a field of rivalry between the US and EU on the one side and Russia on the other. After Montenegro, NATO seeks to bring F.Y.R.O.M within the alliance slapping Russian influence in the region. Needless to say that in a period where border questions are raised again in the Balkans, F.Y.R.O.M needs political stability and growth prospects.



GREECE: October 25th, in response to warnings this week from Turkey that it will take all necessary measures to protect its interests in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean from supposed unilateral Greek actions, Athens described Ankara as a “violator” of international law. “*Delimitation of Greece's Exclusive Economic Zone, in its totality, shall be determined on the basis of international law and*

certainly not by taking into account nonexistent and arbitrary theories adopted by Turkey, a violator of international law,” the Greek Foreign Ministry said in a statement. “*We call upon our neighbor Turkey to act with due seriousness and commitment to the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations,*” it added. Turkey issued its warnings to Greece via the country's Defense Minister Hulusi Akar in the wake of comments made last week by former Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias, who claimed Greece was ready to extend its western maritime borders from 6 to 12 nautical miles. Ankara resumed the rhetoric Thursday, with Akar urging Greece to uphold international treaties and to move ahead with the demilitarization of the eastern Aegean islands. Referring to the issue of demilitarization, the Foreign Ministry in Athens said, “*The well-known positions of Greece stem exclusively from international law and the UN Charter and leave no room for doubt.*” It added that Greece will not be “*drawn into an exchange in aggressive rhetoric.*” Akar said this week that Turkey has maps and photographic material which, in its view, show that Greece's actions in the Aegean – sometimes with the backing of European and other Western powers – go against the interests of Turkey. The Turkish official called on Greece to desist from “provocations” and to respect international law. Commenting on the Turkish assertions, Alternate Defense Minister Panagiotis Rigas said that Greece is pursuing a low-profile policy in order to keep lines of communication between the two countries open. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- October 27th, Turkey issued a Navigational Telex (NAVTEX) to announce that it is reserving an area surrounding the territorial waters of the small Greek island of Kastelorizo in the

southeastern Aegean on October 31st, 2018 for a search and rescue exercise. According to the marine advisory, the Turkish Navy will block the area to marine traffic for four hours, starting at 11 p.m. Commenting on the move, New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) shadow foreign minister George Koumoutsakos accused Turkey of irresponsibility and stoking tension between the two countries. *“The new unacceptable Turkish NAVTEX and Turkey’s persistently infringing behavior maintain and feed the tension in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean,”* he said in a statement. *“Ankara thus tests the stability and peace in this sensitive area. This irresponsible attitude must be opposed not only by Greece and the affected states, but by the entire international community,”* he added. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling coalition of SYRIZA – ANEL intensifies its efforts to reverse political atmosphere since the country enters gradually in a long pre-electoral period. Tsipras and Kammenos try to gain time planning to relief society with social care measures. Taking into consideration that measures will start to be voted next month it is assessed that early election may be called in May 2019 together with local and European election. Ruling coalition believes that it is enough time so people to enjoy relief measures reversing political climate. Of course there is always the alternative scenario of parliamentary election in autumn 2019. Greece (and Cyprus) enters in a risky period of tension with Turkey. A navy frigate is already closely monitors the Turkish drilling ship “Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha” while the Turkish NAVTEX surrounding the island of Kastelorizo raises tension. Next week will be a critical week

to see if Turkey keep maintaining a war of words or it will escalate situation.



KOSOVO: October 25th, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Diaspora, Dardan Gashi, revealed (in an interview with T7 TV station) a meeting between the Government representatives and President Hashim Thaci was held and they reached an agreement not to discuss change of borders with Serbia in Brussels. *“The Government has no mandate to talk on borders, and no one has the mandate to discuss this issue,”* Gashi said. *“We reached an accord that borders are nonnegotiable and no one has the right to launch such negotiations. There is a full agreement not to discuss borders issue,”* Gashi said. He said the decision was taken during a meeting between the Deputy Prime Minister Fatmir Limaj, who has been proposed by Kosovo Government to lead the negotiation team in dialogue with Serbia, President Hashim Thaci, which was attended also by Gashi. According to Gashi the Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj did not attend the meeting. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- October 25th, Kosovo’s EU Minister Dhurata Hoxha stressed that the EU should focus on the enlargement process as a mechanism to make the EU family more sustainable. *“Western Balkan countries should take in advantage their accession in the EU by incorporating best values and practices in their national policies,”* Hoxha said. Speaking about Kosovo, Hoxha said that she expects that during the Austrian presidency in the EU a decision on lifting visas for Kosovo citizens will be taken. She also reiterated that Kosovo has already fulfilled all the benchmarks deriving from the visa liberalization roadmap. *“Our citizens believe in the European values, by following*

integration rules and values. During the Austrian Presidency in the EU we expect unreserved support, especially on reforms we have already fulfilled, which are reflected in the joint strategies already adopted,” Hoxha said. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- October 26th, Kosovo 2019 budget will be 2.3 billion euros which is expected to be the highest ever for Kosovo. This was stated by the Minister of Finances, Bedri Hamza, during Government's meeting. The Government discussed the draft law on 2019 budget. Hamza announced that around 300 million euros are expected to be allocated for education whereas 250 million for the health sector. The Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj referring to the draft budget said that the state budget “*Confirms good news for Kosovo.*” (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo – Serbia negotiations has entered in a critical phase. Although border exchange is on the table there are strong reactions among Kosovo political forces which are opposed in such scenarios. President Thaci is in favor of border correction with Serbia but the Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj is against. It is leaked that an agreement has been reached between the President and the Government that none from Kosovo has a mandate to negotiate border change. However, this issue has a long route until a successful and sustainable end. It seems that the U.S (and the EU) factor has a leading role in the background pushing for such a solution. Presevo Valley with a significant Albanian minority goes to Kosovo and Northern Kosovo with Serb majority will become Serbian territory. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms

which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. A mutual accepted agreement between Kosovo and Serbia is the critical point for the country in order to start approaching the Euro-Atlantic integration. Kosovo army issue is a case which may cause tension with Serbia and it seems that the state seeks to accelerate actions towards transformation of KSF into a regular army. Of course such unilateral actions are harmful for Kosovo – Serbia dialogue.



MOLDOVA: October 23rd, the Delegation of Moldova to the Joint Control Commission (JCC) reported a new case of non-compliance by the peacekeeping forces of Russia with the established rotation procedures. Thus, on October 23rd, 2018 without a notification, Russian troops were held military training in the Security Zone. This incident proves the ineffectiveness of the existing mechanism of interaction within the Joint Military Command. In this context, the Chisinau Delegation reiterated its proposal to develop and approve a new functioning and coordinated regulation to ensure the effective reaction of the Military Commands in the case of unlawful actions carried out in the Security Zone by alleged forces of power and paramilitary formations. Next Commission meeting will be held on November 1st, 2018. (www.moldova.org)

- October 24th, Deputy Prime Minister Cristina Lesnic attended a meeting of the Parliamentary Commission for National Security, Defense and Public Order, the Reintegration Polices Bureau has reported. At the event, Lesnic said that the goals of Moldova's reintegration seek to promote

comprehensive solutions regarding the Transnistrian settlement, guaranteeing Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Lesnic noted that, in this respect, the Moldovan authorities made all possible efforts to fulfill this task. Participants in the meeting discussed current situation in the Transnistrian issue, especially topics contained in the so-called "Berlin Plus" package, as follows: the situation of the Latin-script schools from the left bank of Dniester, bridge from the Gura Bacului-Bacioc settlements, mechanism of adopting neutral model education acts, access to the farmlands beyond the Camenca – Tiraspol highway, organizing the interaction in the telecommunication sector, mechanism of access of vehicles from the Transnistrian region with neutral registration plates to the international road traffic, ensuring the free movement between the two banks of Dniester, etc. National authorities' representatives presented their concerns, potential risks and proposals of actions needed to be undertaken, in order to maintain the law, order and security. Also, the participants approached the level of preparation for the meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, scheduled for late 2018. (www.moldpress.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political life is "hostage" of the pro-Russian President Igor Dodon and pro-Western Government rivalry which undermines the institutional function of the country. In the wider framework Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. Political situation in the country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which will strengthen state's transparency, accountability and democratic

values. Invalidation of local elections in Chisinau by the Constitutional Court badly affected state's profile and mainly relations with the EU. Moreover, the Government is sliding into dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime. The U.S, EU and IMF express their major concerns. By autumn the state has entered in pre-election period although elections are scheduled for February 24th, 2019. The "Transnistria case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: October

23rd, KFOR Commander, Major General Salvatore Cuoci, welcomed Montenegro in KFOR as the 29th troop contributing nation (21 NATO members and 8 partners). The ceremony to transfer the authority of Operational Control by deploying one staff officer in the operation, attended also by Predrag Boskovic, Minister of Defense of Montenegro, was held in Camp "Film City" in Pristina. *"For a neighboring country like Montenegro it is significant to contribute to the safe and secure environment and freedom of movement in the Western Balkans, and choosing to be part of an operation like KFOR is a concrete step forward to the normalization of the area,"* said KFOR Commander Salvatore Cuoci in his opening remarks during the ceremony. NATO welcomes any further contribution to KFOR from any member or partner to consolidate stability and security in the Balkans. However, Serbia has reacted in Montenegro's participation in the mission. Serbian Defense Minister Alexander Vulin responded to his Montenegrin counterpart Predrag Boskovic, who said that Kosovo is *"a sovereign state"* by saying *"Montenegro, which has joined KFOR, should know that this mission*

was established on the basis of 1244 UN Security Council Resolution and this resolution does not mention the state of Kosovo. Members of the KFOR mission must be status neutral and therefore statements made by the Montenegrin Minister of Defense about supporting the state of Kosovo are not in accordance with the KFOR mission. I hope that Montenegro knows it has sent its officers to the KFOR mission, not to the Kosovo Security Forces.” (www.gazetaexpress.com, www.b92.net)

- October 25th, the Prime Minister Dusko Markovic assessed that Montenegro has completed the most demanding part towards accession to the EU. According to him Montenegro will most certainly join the EU before 2025 or in 2025. *“Over the past thirty years, the European perspective of the Western Balkans has never been more certain and the Balkans have never been in a better position. That doesn’t mean we’re not exposed to risks. Instabilities come as the result of various processes on the global scene. We are witnessing an extremely rapid increase of protectionism, populist ideas and economic rivalries such as economic tensions between China, the U.S, and the EU. In this context, the Balkans are implementing its European agenda, and Montenegro and Serbia are the frontrunners on this path. The question is, are we successful?”* Markovic said. Opening chapters of the EU negotiation process represents an essential change in the country and society. (www.cdm.me)

- October 26th, President of the Democratic People's Party (Demokratska Narodna Partija - DNP) and one of the leaders of Democratic Front (Demokratski Front), Milan Knezevic, said that Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic’s

statement that the Serbs should enter the Government of Dusko Markovic is not a new thing. He had said the same thing at the meeting of the state authorities of Serbia which was held on August 5th, 2018. During a TV show Dacic said that Serbs in Montenegro should form a coalition with DNP and enter the Government. Knezevic claimed that his “advice” does not correspond to his previous statement that he does not care what is going on in Montenegro. *“Around 185.000 citizens in Montenegro voted on the 2006 referendum in favor of a common country with Serbia and I do care for Serbia. We want to build the best possible relations with our brotherly nation. But, of course, there’s a possibility that my understanding of state policy is a little bit old-fashioned and that some more modern trends are in, such as the fact that Vice President of Serbia, Rasim Ljajic and Ramush Haradinaj drink espresso and chat in Budva, while the Serbian people in Montenegro is collecting signatures for the withdrawal of the recognition of Kosovo. Everybody has priorities. Somebody feels more attached to Haradinaj than to Serbs in Montenegro, somebody even more attached to Lesotho and Papua New Guinea. But after Montenegro, we mostly care for Serbia and its national interests,”* Knezevic said. The President of the Serbian National Council, Momcilo Vuksanovic claimed that it is impossible to organize a state without the Serbs. *“However, the current Government in Montenegro is working against the identity interests of Serbs and therefore, they [Serbs] can’t be part of the Government,”* Vuksanovic said. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Major reforms should be implemented in order the country to come closer to the EU.

Montenegro shows activity within NATO not only because decided to send troops in Kosovo, but also because plans to join NATO forces in Latvia and Poland. Although the state fulfills its obligations as a full member of the Alliance questions are raised for such initiatives due to their impact in Montenegro's society but also in country's foreign relations. A large number of people is opposed in NATO and maintains pro-Russian stance while Montenegro's presence in Kosovo may harm relations with Serbia.



ROMANIA: October 22nd, Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) CF-188 Hornets, working with the Romanian Air Force as part of the NATO enhanced Air Policing, intercepted a Russian Su-27 Flanker aircraft that was operating near Romanian airspace over the Black Sea, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). When the Russian aircraft was detected by the Control and Reporting Centre of the Romanian Air Force, RCAF Hornets were scrambled by NATO's southern Combined Air Operations Centre at Torrejon, Spain. *"The Russian aircraft was closely monitored by our Hornets before it left the Romanian Flight Information Region,"* said the RCAF statement. The Canadian Armed Forces have members serving on Operation REASSURANCE in Central and Eastern Europe. They are there as part of NATO assurance and deterrence measures. These measures aim to reinforce NATO's collective defense. (www.romania-insider.com)

- October 25th, if the United States deploys intermediate-range missiles in Europe, Russia will have to target the countries that might host them, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned. The statement comes as the US President Donald

Trump said this past weekend that the United States will withdraw from the nuclear arms treaty with Russia signed in 1987. The Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty (INF) banned ground-launch nuclear missiles with ranges from 500 km to 5,500 km. Putin said he hoped the United States would not follow through with placing intermediate-range missiles in Europe. He called such a move a repeat of a Cold War crisis in the 1980s, when both countries deployed intermediate-range missiles in Europe. The European nations that agree to host such missiles need to understand that they expose their territories to possible attacks as a retaliatory strike, Putin said. He said he did not understand why Europe should be put *"in such grave danger."* While rejecting the US President's claim that Russia breached the INF treaty, Putin said that the US missile defense facilities in Romania hold *"intermediate-range cruise missiles with just a tweak in computer software."* (www.romania-insider.com)

- October 26th, the European Parliament (EP) will vote in its plenary sitting on November 14th, 2018 the resolution on the rule of law in Romania, according to the draft agenda published on the website of the European institution. This vote would thus come the day after the latest Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) report of the European Commission (EC) will be published, which is scheduled for November 13th, 2018. The EC said that it would also take into account the two Venice Commission opinions on the justice laws and the criminal codes when drafting its report. The resolution to be adopted in mid-November comes after the debate in the EP plenary session on October 3rd, 2018, which focused on the latest reform of Romania's judicial system. President Klaus Iohannis said earlier this

week, during a joint press conference with Antonio Tajani, the President of the EP, that “It is extremely unusual for the European Parliament to debate and vote a resolution on a Member State just one month ahead of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.” adding “The European Parliament obviously has the right to debate problems, issues and, if necessary, to come up with resolutions which have to be voted. It is their right. [...] Romania is a functioning democracy and Romania obeys the rule of law. But, on the other hand, of course, Romania is a very lively democracy and we have approaches which some believe are not of the good kind. [...] Nevertheless, it is extremely unusual for the European Parliament to debate and vote a resolution on a Member State just one month ahead of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which will be taken over by this Member State. The decision is with the European Parliament.” Romania will hold the Presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2019. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government continues in the field of Justice. The EU through several channels expresses its concerns over political situation in Romania hardening its rhetoric. The Venice Commission expressed its concerns over independence of state's judiciary taking into consideration the promoted amendments on judicial legislation. Iohannis strongly opposes in Government's plans to intervene in judicial system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state's justice. The country is preparing to take over the EU Presidency in the first half of 2019. Romania

according to NATO strategic and operational planning is becoming an advanced base close to Russia.



SERBIA: October 23rd, a spokesman of the Austrian Presidency said Vienna is hoping to open at least three new chapters in Serbia's EU accession talks. The working bodies of the EU Council gave progress in three negotiating chapters: 9, 17, and 18. Serbia and the European Commission also submitted to the Council negotiating positions for chapters 2 and 4. Serbia, on the previous, 8th Intergovernmental Conference held on June 25th, 2018 in Luxembourg, opened two new chapters. Serbia has a total of 35 chapters so far, of which 14 are still open, and two temporarily closed. (www.b92.net)

- October 25th, Serbian Interior Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic that he personally has sent letters to all members of Interpol explaining the reasons against the membership of Kosovo, but also that it should be taken into consideration that there are those who will never change their position for personal interests - and those who are “willing to reconsider.” He explained that only countries that are members of the UN could join Interpol, or hold the role of an UN observer. In addition to these legal reasons against Kosovo's membership in Interpol, there are also political reasons, Stefanovic continued. “First of all that [UN Security Council] Resolution 1244 says that Kosovo is part of Serbia, the second, that we have clear indications that this membership would be used to raise Interpol notices against everyone who they (Pristina) think is inappropriate - that is quite clear,” Stefanovic said. “They (Pristina) do not want to go through UNMIK - they want membership as proof of their so-called statehood,

and that's all this is about," Stefanovic said. (www.b92.net)

- October 26th, the Prime Minister Ana Brnabic announced that the Government will shortly propose to the Assembly to start amending the Constitution. The Secretariat of the Venice Commission lighted the "green light" for amendment of the Constitution sending a letter in which it has been written that they agree with the constitutional amendments made by the Ministry of Justice. Brnabic was at the Assembly, where she was responding to the questions from deputies, when she pointed out that she is extremely proud of heading a Government that has been conducting a public debate over constitutional changes and amendments for more than a year. *"This is an example of a democratic society and I believe that the Ministry of Justice has done a serious job,"* she said. If the Assembly accepts amendments to the Constitution, Serbia will be an example of a successful reform of the judiciary, the Prime minister claimed. (www.b92.net)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Relative security stability. Serbia's path towards the EU and NATO goes through Kosovo case resolution. Although dialogue has started in Brussels is full of obstacles which undermine establishment of confidence and good will between two parties. However, Vucic's statements show that Serbia is ready to compromise recognizing that it cannot gain everything through negotiations. Actions of ethnic minorities in Serbia such as Albanians in south Serbia or Muslim Bosnians in Sandzak region touch the sensitive issue of national security of the state. By expressing neutrality and maintaining equal

distance from the U.S.A and Russia it moves in an environment of fragile balance. Serbian President and Government assess that current international "atmosphere" is in favor of Serbia after a long political and diplomatic isolation of the state.



SLOVENIA: October 22nd,

Employees of the Slovenian Intelligence and Security Agency (SOVA) have ended their strike started on November 30th, 2017. The agency's administration concluded an agreement with the trade union on further steps to improve the status of employees in the agency, it was stated by the Government Communication Office. (www.dnevnik.si)

- October 25th, the Parliament rejected the third attempt by the opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka - SDS) to bring VAT to pre-crisis levels. At the height of the crisis, the higher VAT rate was raised from 20% to 22% and the reduced rate from 8.5% to 9.5% as a crisis measure, but the 2014-2018 Miro Cerar Government made the rates permanent. Arguing that budget revenue has been rising since 2014 along with economic growth, the SDS proposed restoring the pre-crisis rates as well as introducing an additional reduced rate of 5%. The 5% rate would apply to basic necessities, such as basic food, water, medicine, books, apartments etc, as well as - after consultation with EU bodies - energy. The Government opposes the VAT cut due to fiscal consolidation. *"Currently, Slovenia's budget does not allow for VAT cuts without simultaneous measures on the revenue or expenditure side,"* said Sasa Jazbec of the Finance Ministry. (www.sloveniantimes.com)

- October 26th, a historic decision was made by the Supreme Court which decided that journalists

have the right to protect their resources during judicial proceedings. The court received such a decision in the case of Dnevnik's article, which reported on the alleged disputed operation of the former Ambassador in Paris, Janez Sumrade. More specifically the Supreme Court ruled that journalists in court procedures - except in exceptional circumstances - do not have to disclose their sources. It is the first decision of such kind in Slovenia, and it was presented by the Supreme Court as a precedent. In its assessment, the Supreme Court relied on the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which in a series of judgments has already formulated the principles regarding the protection of journalist's resources. According to the ECHR anonymity of resources is an integral part of the journalist's freedom of expression. (www.dnevnik.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability after formation of a minority Government. Ruling coalition has a lot to do in economy and social car, while there open issues in foreign policy.



TURKEY: October 23rd, there will be no alliance between the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi - MHP) in the upcoming local elections, the leaders of the two parties announced, although the People's Alliance that was initially formed for the June 24th, 2018 elections will still continue in Parliament. MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli said that the party no longer seeks an alliance with AKP in the upcoming local elections following a heated

debate between the two parties over a proposed amnesty bill and a high court decision on the "Student Oath" practice in elementary schools. "We no longer have the expectation, search or intent for an alliance for the March 31st, 2019, local elections as a party at this stage. It won't be possible to reach anywhere with forced meetings," Bahçeli told the MHP's parliamentary group in Ankara, referring to meetings conducted between AKP and MHP officials over a possible alliance in the upcoming municipal elections. Turkish currency, the lira, was badly hit by Bahçeli's comments, losing some 3% in value before partially recovering after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's address before the AKP parliamentary group. "We see that MHP made a different choice for itself, we respect that. The only thing that we can say is since they say they will go their own way in the local elections, we say that everyone should go their own way," he said. However, Erdogan added that they see the People's Alliance as the one of the most remarkable gains of the last few years and would like to make it last. (www.dailysabah.com)

- October 23rd, the Turkish Foreign Ministry summoned the Greek Ambassador in Ankara Petros Mavroidis, according to diplomatic sources. The Ambassador was summoned to the Ministry over recent remarks by Nikos Kotzias, who recently resigned as Greek Foreign Minister. Kotzias has announced that Greece was ready to extend its territorial waters from 6 to 12 miles in the Ionian Sea (Western Greece). Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Hami Aksoy said later in the day that "views and warnings" were conveyed to Mavroidis over Greece's one-sided moves in the Aegean. "We have followed the statements of Greece's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Kotzias and its Prime Minister and new Minister

of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Tsipras regarding the plans for the gradual extension of Greek territorial waters, as well as the related news,” Aksoy said in a statement. “We cannot tolerate any step that is not based on mutual consent in the Aegean Sea where two countries have opposite coasts. The declaration of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, dated June 8th, 1995, contains a necessary political warning and is still in force today,” the statement said. The declaration warns that if Greece increases its territorial waters in the Aegean Sea beyond 6 miles, the Turkish Parliament will give “all powers” including the military power, to the Government to defend Turkey's interests. On October 18th, 2018 the Turkish navy stopped a Greek frigate from harassing a Turkish research ship on the “Turkish continental shelf off the coast of North Cyprus.” Ankara warned Athens after the incident to “Abstain from acts that would cause an escalation in the region.” Turkey has consistently contested the Greek Cypriot administration's unilateral drilling activity in the Eastern Mediterranean, saying Turkish Cypriots also have rights to the resources around the area. (www.dailysabah.com)

- October 28th, the nearly eight-year conflict in Syria must be solved through a negotiated political process, instead of insistence on military confrontation, the leaders of Turkey, Russia, Germany and France declared following the historic quartet summit in Istanbul. Experts say although the parties involved have different priorities and interests regarding Syria, meeting on the common denominator of “political process” is a hopeful outcome for the region. *“The interests of the four countries are not quite aligned when it comes to Syria. Yet, the fact that they all agree on a negotiated political process,*

instead of a military solution, is significant,” said Murat Yesiltas, an academic at Ankara Social Science University and Director of Security Studies at the Ankara-based Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA). President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hosted Russian President Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron at the summit, which was held at the historical Vahdettin Pavilion overlooking Istanbul's Bosphorus. Speaking at a joint news conference after the summit, Erdogan said the summit aimed at reaching a full cease-fire to halt bloodshed in Syria. *“The Syria conflict cannot be solved merely by military means. We will improve cooperation against the terror threat from Syria,”* Erdogan said, adding that a constitutional committee for Syria should be formed as soon as possible. *“There could be no military solution to the ongoing conflict and it could be resolved only through a negotiated political process in line with the U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254,”* a final joint statement released following the summit. Commitment to Syria's territorial integrity and formation of a committee to draft a new Constitution for Syria is among the highlighted points of the summit. The parties have *“Reaffirmed their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, and to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations,”* the final statement said. The parties in the summit do not necessarily have an aligned position regarding the Syria crisis. Russia, for example, is the main backer of Syria's Bashar Assad, while Ankara says Assad must go for the country to have a peaceful transition. Turkey has long said Assad is responsible for the killings of hundreds of thousands of Syrians. In addition, when it comes to terrorist groups in Syria, Turkey

sees the PKK's Syria affiliate, the People's Protection Units (YPG) as a terrorist group, while Germany and France only see the PKK as a terrorist group, but not the YPG. Russia, on the other hand, does not see the PKK as a terrorist group, which Ankara has been fighting for nearly four decades, nor do they see the YPG as a terrorist group. The issue of the YPG is particularly a matter of disagreement among the parties. Meanwhile, joint patrols by Turkey and Russia in Idlib are set to begin in November 2018 to ensure the safety of civilians and compliance with the cease-fire in line with the Sochi deal. According to news reports, regular coordinated patrols in the 20-kilometer buffer zones that separate the opposition forces and Syrian regime still continues, while preparations for the joint patrols stepped up recently. (www.dailysabah.com)



Leaders of France, Germany, Russia, and Turkey
at Istanbul Summit
(www.tccb.gov.tr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being

persecuted. Turkish – U.S relations have strongly been harmed forcing Ankara to approach new allies such as Russia. Turkey re-examines its relations with the EU in an effort to avoid international and regional isolation. Turkish economy is under heavy pressure and at the moment is its “Achille’s heel” bringing the state on the edge of collapse. Turkish Armed Forces have been engaged in military operations against Kurds and PKK in Northern Iraq. The state tries to show a leading role regarding Syria’s “next day” and Istanbul Summit was towards this direction. Turkey has made clear that there is no solution in Syria without it in talks and negotiations since it is a matter of national security. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state.

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NOTE

- Stable situation. No security risk
- Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored
- Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions
- Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk
- Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict