

NOVEMBER 20 – 26, 2017 – 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: November 20th, Albanian President, Ilir Meta paid a two days visit in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (F.Y.R.O.M) where he met with his counterpart Gjorge Ivanov, the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, the Parliament's Speaker, Talat Xhaferi, and all leaders of Albanian political parties in F.Y.R.O.M. During his meeting with Ivanov, Meta expressed Albania's commitment in respect of minorities, their identity and culture. Moreover Meta underlined his personal support in *"Macedonian community in Albania"* adding that *"I will keep supporting this ethnic community in an attempt to strengthen its identity and position, because the community is of great value for our country"*. During his meeting with the Prime Minister Zaev, Meta congratulated him for his effort to improve the interethnic relations in his country, and also relations with neighboring countries. Moreover the Albanian President expressed his confidence for the opening of the EU accession talks for both countries in 2018. Finally during his meeting with Xhaferi, Meta expressed his satisfaction that an ethnic Albanian of F.Y.R.O.M became the Parliament's Speaker for first time in country's history. According to Meta the Albanian political stakeholder is vital for interethnic harmony in the country underlying the need for cooperation and dialogue of all political forces for the good of F.Y.R.O.M's future. (www.albaniannews.com)

- November 22nd, Albanian Defense Minister Olta Xhacka paid a one day visit in Afghanistan where she met with NATO's Commander Resolute Support, General John Nicholson and NATO's Senior Civilian Representative, Ambassador Cornelius Zimmermann. Xhacka claimed that Albania will increase its presence in Afghanistan by 60% in 2018 adding that this increase will

include a contingent of Special Forces. According to the Minister Albania will focus in 2018 in "Force Protection", advisory, and assistance in the West Command in Heart. Moreover the Minister underlined that *"the decision to increase troops in Kabul and Herat is our response to our strategic partnership with the US and to our support in the US strategy in Southeast Asia"*. During her visit Xhacka visited the Albanian troops at NATO's Resolute Support Mission (RSM) Headquarters and "Karzai" International Airport in Kabul where they carry out their mission expressing her gratitude for their services. Albanian armed forces are engaged in Afghanistan since 2002 and nowadays there are 83 people in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif. (www.mod.gov.al, www.albaniannews.com)



Albanian Minister of Defense in Afghanistan
(photo source:www.aaf.mil.al)

- November 24th, failure of police to arrest three senior police officers from the city of Vlora accused of drug cultivation and drug trafficking within the framework of the structured criminal group raised political tension in Albania. Leader of opposition's Democratic Party (PD) Lulzim Basha accused Minister of Interior, Fatmir Xhafaj following orders of the Prime Minister Edi Rama as responsible for the failure of the arrest of three officers in order to protect himself, the Prime Minister and ex Minister of Interior, Saimir

Tahiri. According to Basha Ministry of Interior and Police “*acted as a criminal organization*” due to the ties between the accused officers and politicians of the ruling party. Basha added that “*there is a need for a comprehensive reform of the Ministry of Interior and the Police*” while he asked for Prime Minister’s resignation. Minister of Interior, Fatmir Xhafaj claimed that there are strong suspicions that the operation of arresting the three police officers has been leaked. Authorities believe that the three wanted officers have already left the country. (www.tvklan.al)

BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

November 20th, the President of Republica Srpska (RS) Milorad Dodik claimed in an interview in the German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) that his entity and North Kosovo could be annexed one day by Serbia. During the interview he redrew a map of Balkans presenting the borders of the region after ten years. According to Dodik a referendum to RS with the question of independence “*is my dream*” but he did not hesitate to say that he will not force his citizens towards this referendum “*at any price*” due to his responsibility towards its own people. In fact this statement was Dodik’s answer against the Muslim member of the tripartite Presidency of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bakir Izetbegovic who had stated in DW that he would not hesitate to use armed violence in order to stop a possible referendum in RS. One day later Serbian Prime Minister’s office stated that “*Serbia does not want to annexe RS*”. (www.dw.com, www.sarajevotimes.com, www.balkaninsight.com)

- November 22nd, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) convicted former Bosnian Serb military Chief Ratko Mladic to life imprisonment finding him



RS President Milorad Dodik redraws Balkan map
(photo source: www.dw.com)

guilty for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Mladic found guilty among others for committed genocide in Srebrenica where 7,000 Muslim men and boys killed by Serbian forces under his command control. Mladic’s legal team announced that it will launch an appeal against Court’s decision. (www.icty.org, www.balkaninsight.com)

BULGARIA: November 21st, for the period January – September 2017, exports of goods from Bulgaria increased by 14% (amounted to EUR 19.6 billion) ranking the country in the top five of the EU countries on this indicator. According to Deputy Minister of Economy, Lachezar Borisov Bulgaria will continue to support exports as they have become one of the main sources of growth in country’s economy. (www.novinite.com)

CROATIA: November 20th, Croatian Ministry of Defense is about to decide for its new fighter aircraft. A month and a half ago it received four bids and it should complete its evaluation process until November 30th. The US offer F-16 Block 70/72; an aircraft close to 5th generation fighter jets but also extremely expensive. On the other hand Greece proposed F-16 Block 30 which is actually a cheap proposal but the Greek planes would immediately have to undergo

modernization. Consequently the Croatian leadership is about to decide between the Israeli F-16s “BARAK” and the Swedish JAS 39 C/D “GRIPEN”. The first one is EUR 300 million cheaper than the Swedish aircraft and moreover Croatia is attracted by the prospect of strategic defense cooperation with Israel. On the other hand SAAB’s “GRIPEN” is a brand new fighter jet and the Swedish industry with the support of its government pushes the Croats to choose their bid. Croatia is interested in buying 18 aircrafts and for its final decision apart from the characteristics and capabilities of the plane will comprise three segments: intergovernmental contract, price and business-economic cooperation package. (www.total-croatia-news.com, www.vecernji.hr, www.defensenews.com)

- November 23rd, while rumors of early parliamentary elections and reshuffle of the government are widely disseminated in the country, ministers of the government deny any possibility of such scenarios. According to the annual special edition of “The Economist” “the World in 2018” there is a possibility the Croat Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic could call for early parliamentary elections. Regarding the government’s reshuffle it is widely spoken that the Minister of Finance, Zdravko Maric will resign and he will be replaced by the current Minister of Environmental Protection and Energy, Tomislav Coric. (www.total-croatia-news.com)

CYPRUS: November 21st, the fifth trilateral summit held in Nicosia between Cyprus, Greece, and Egypt. Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi “expressed their firm commitment to further

broaden and deepen their trilateral partnership in various fields of common interest and to enhance their efforts towards promoting peace, stability, security and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean, based on their shared values and interests”. On energy, the summit reiterated the need for diversification of energy resources and routes, the security of energy supply and the need to modernize and develop new energy infrastructures. The three leaders also met with the chairman and CEO of the EuroAfrica interconnector, Nasos Ktorides. Interconnector project is a 1619 km subsea cable which will connect the electricity grids of the three countries with Europe. (www.cyprus-mail.com)



Leaders of Egypt, Cyprus and Greece during the 5th trilateral summit
(photo source: www.mfa.gov.cy)

- November 23rd, Italian energy company ENI announced its plans for two new exploratory drills for natural gas in Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone and more specifically in sea fields 6 and 3 in next two months. The announcement was made by Minister of Energy, Giorgos Lakkotrypis and ENI’s CEO Claudio Descalzi after a meeting with the Cypriot President, Nikos Anastasiades. ENI’s plans may raise tension in the region since Turkey claims that sea field six belongs to its continental shelf and according to a letter in the UN last April Turkey stated that “it will not allow

foreign companies to conduct unauthorized hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation activity in its continental shelf" (www.daily-mail.com, www.sigmalive.com)

F.Y.R.O.M: November 23rd, officials of the governments of F.Y.R.O.M and Bulgaria signed several agreements of cooperation during a joint session held in Strumitsa. Agreements were signed regarding defense, telecommunications, tourism, energy etc. More specifically in the field of defense the two countries signed a protocol regarding training of F.Y.R.O.M's military personnel in armed forces schools in Bulgaria. In energy the agreements were related to electricity distribution and natural gas inter-system connection. (www.mia.mk)

- November 25th, under the shadow of the wiretapping scandal in 2015, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev said that the country makes substantial progress in reforming security services. He also added that the communication surveillance system will remain under control of the Public Prosecution Office for criminal investigations. However the Ministry of Interior will be authorized to use the system under court's order for combating terrorism, extremism, and radicalism. Zaev underlined that the reforms focus on eliminating all possibilities of the abuse of the system by the intelligence service in order to avoid a similar future scandal. (www.mia.mk)

GREECE: November 20th, Fofi Genimata is the newly elected leader of the centre – left political forces in Greece. Elections were held in an effort to unite all the political parties in Greece which belong ideologically in the centre – left wing and they appear fragmented in the current political landscape. The electoral procedure was

unexpectedly successful since 210,264 voters participated in the first round and 160,000 people in the second one providing the necessary legitimacy in Genimata's election. Fofi Genimata is the current leader of the Socialist Party of Greece (PASOK) while another parliamentary party joined the procedure; "The River" ("To Potami"). Leaders of all political forms which belong to the centre – left frame have agreed to compromise no matter what the result would be in order to present a united political formation in the future parliamentary elections aiming at gaining more seats in the new Parliament and playing central role in the formation of a new coalition government. (www.kathimerini.gr, www.naftemporiki.gr)

- November 23rd, political tension has raised dramatically in Greece regarding the issue of the sale of 300,000 Greek army artillery projectiles 105 mil to Saudi Arabia. Opposition raised serious questions and reactions against the coming agreement and mainly about the legal procedures for selling defensive material to other countries. Opposition focus its reactions on the role of a specific individual which looks like having crucial role in the whole procedure. On the other hand the law explicitly states that an official transnational agreement is required for any defense procurement and no individual may sign on behalf of any party unless they are an official authorized representative of a State. On November 27th, 2017 Minister of Defense, Panos Kamenos will show up in the Parliament to provide explanations about the agreement and it is expected an "explosive" parliamentary session. Panos Kamenos is the leader of "Independent Greeks" ("Anexartiti Ellines") party which joins the governmental coalition together with "Coalition of Radical Left" ("SYRIZA") and

there are rumors that the “Saudi Arabia” case may cause negative repercussions in ruling coalition’s viability. (www.kathimerini.gr, www.naftemporiki.gr, www.greekreporter.com)

- November 24th, the Greek – Cypriot Intergovernmental Defense Council session was held in Athens with the presence of the Defense Ministers of both countries, Panos Kamenos and Christoforos Fokaides, the Chief of Hellenic National Defense General Staff, Admiral Evaggelos Apostolakis, the Chief of Cyprus National Guard General Staff, Lieutenant General Elias Leontaris, and high ranked officers from Greece and Cyprus. During the session it was reviewed the work that has been done recently in the framework of the permanent, stable and upgraded cooperation between Greece and Cyprus in the defense sector. The mutual Memorandum of crisis management that has been signed and defines the framework for joint operational planning to address common threats at bilateral level and the ever closer cooperation at operational and staff level, silently and systematically, has significantly strengthened the Greek-Cypriot defensive conjunction. Both countries expressed their commitment in promoting not only their common national interests, but also the European interests especially in the unstable and troubled region of Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Two sides emphasized in deepening cooperation in intelligence sector, cyber-defense. Towards this direction it was signed an agreement of classified information exchange between the two states. Moreover an updated Memorandum of Cooperation in air-defense was signed by the two sides. Special attention was paid in the new EU security structure which was formed through

Permanent Security Cooperation (PESCO) initiative. (www.mod.mil.gr)



Greece – Cyprus Intergovernmental Defense Council

(Photo source: www.mod.mil.gr)

KOSOVO: November 22nd, the Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said that the government will forward to the Assembly the current version of the Draft Law on demarcation and will attach an additional report which is expected to be handed over by the state Commission on demarcation appointed by Haradinaj to review the disputed border deal with Montenegro signed in 2015. Haradinaj also stated in an interview that he remains skeptical the ruling coalition has the majority to ratify the agreement hinting that most likely the border dispute with Montenegro will be solved through international arbitration. *“It is obvious ruling coalition lacks two third of votes in Parliament”* Haradinaj said. Ratification of the Agreement on border demarcation is one of the last criteria for Kosovo to get visa free regime with the EU Schengen area.

- November 23rd, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj based on the Law on official holidays has decided that 28th of November, as the day of Albanians, will be a non-working day. The Prime Minister has

proclaimed that 28th of November, traditionally known as the “Flag Day”, will be a non-working day, in order to respect cultural and historical values, and the good family and social traditions. It should also be underlined that November 28th is the independence day of Albania. (www.kryeministri-ks.net, www.gazetaexpress.com)

- November 25th, The Kosovo Court of Appeals has decided to release from detention on remand the opposition “Self-Determination” party (“Vetevendosje”) MPs, Albin Kurti, Albulena Haxhiu and Donika Kadaj-Bujupi. The three MPs were arrested on November 24th, 2017 by the Kosovo Police after they failed to show up in court to face charges of letting off tear gas in parliament last year trying to stop MPs from ratifying a controversial border deal with Montenegro, and from establishing the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

MOLDOVA: November 21st, an official letter of the Moldovan Permanent Representative to the UN, Victor Moraru was leaked asking the UN General Assembly General Committee to not include in the agenda the item of “Complete withdrawal of the foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova”; in other words, the withdrawal of Russian troops. Moraru wrote in the letter that the decision to delay the discussion on the withdrawal is to further explore constructive options aimed at facilitating the adoption of a consensual decision. Some would argue that the decision of delay was made in order to have a better attitude of Russia in the upcoming 5+2 negotiations to be held in Vienna. Later, Moldova’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs came up with an official position on the leaked letter and

confirmed that the Government asked for a delay, not for a cancellation of the discussion. Prime Minister Pavel Filip also declared during a government session that the delay was tactical so that the topic is examined more. The Republic of Moldova addressed the United Nations with the request to include the issue of the withdrawal of the Russian peacekeeping forces from Transnistria to the agenda of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly. In a letter from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Moldova to the UN, Victor Moraru stated that the presence of Russian troops “*constitutes a danger to the maintenance of international peace and security.*” The subject was supposed to be discussed in the plenary session of the UN General Assembly on 23 October. Nowadays Russia maintains 402 peacekeepers, and the Operative Group of the Russian Forces in the Transnistrian region of Moldova containing approximately 1200 regular soldiers, mainly recruited among locals. (www.moldova.org)

- November 23rd, the Republic of Moldova signed the agreement with the European Union regarding the macro-financial assistance of 100 million euros; 40 million of grants and 60 million as a loan. The signing was made by the Moldovan Minister of Finances, Octavian Armaşu, and the National Bank Governor, Sergiu Cioclea, on one side, and by the EU Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Customs and Taxation, Pierre Moscovici, on the other side. The conditions that need to be fulfilled by Moldova in order to get the long-awaited macro-financial aid were enunciated by the Commissioner for EU’s Neighborhood, Johannes Hahn, during the meeting with the Moldovan Prime Minister Pavel Filip. According to Hahn, there is a need for further progress regarding reform agenda and

a need to complete and publicize the results of the banking fraud investigation. (www.moldova.org)

- November 23rd, the NATO Liaison Office in Moldova will be launched at the beginning of December 2017. The NATO Deputy Secretary-General Rose Gottemoeller will participate at the inauguration in Chişinău. The announcement was made at the meeting of the Moldovan Prime Minister Pavel Filip and the NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Brussels. Filip confirmed Moldova's interest in political dialogue and cooperation with the Alliance within the Individual Partnership Action Plan Moldova-NATO for 2017-2019 while Stoltenberg highlighted *"we understand and respect that Moldova does not want to join NATO. It is up to your country- and your country alone- to choose your own security arrangements"* (www.moldova.org, www.nato.int)



Meeting of the Moldovan Prime Minister Pavel Filip and the NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

(Photo source: www.nato.int)

MONTENEGRO: November 20th, The Montenegrin Ministry of Minorities drafted a new law for national symbols. According to the Minister Mehmed Zeka, *"This law guarantees minorities to freely use their national symbols. There will no longer be abuses. The rights of*

minorities were sanctioned by Constitution in the past, but not by laws". The law allows national symbols to be used even in areas where the minorities make 5% of the population. Implementation of this law is one of the conditions imposed by the Albanian parties in Montenegro join the governmental coalition. (www.top-channel.tv)

ROMANIA: November 21st, The Chamber of Deputies' plenary passed the draft law on the Patriot missiles purchase by 279 votes to one and one abstention. The Chamber of Deputies was the decision-making body in the case of this draft. A day earlier, on Monday November 20th, 2017, the Defense Committee of the Senate has given also the green light for the Patriot missile purchase. On November 8th, 2017 the Romanian government had approved the draft law enabling the Army to purchase seven Patriot missiles and the necessary equipment, with the total value of the contract mounting to USD 3.9 billion, VAT excluded. The first system will be acquired by the end of this year, for USD 764,780,000, VAT excluded. Defense Minister, Mihai Fifor has stated that the Ministry intends to sign the contract for the first Patriot system by December 1st, 2017. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- November 23rd, Opposition supporters and civil society groups are keeping up the pressure on Romania's ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD), despite the government's survival on Thursday of an impeachment vote in parliament. During the parliamentary session the opposition, civil society activists and trade unions called for renewed protests against various measures taken by the government this year. Around 2,000 opposition supporters gathered in front of parliament to protest against the ruling party and support the

impeachment vote as drivers circled the building, waving Romanian and European Union flags. The opposition and some Social Democrats have called for PSD leader Liviu Dragnea's resignation after National Anti-Corruption Directorate froze all his assets on Tuesday as part of an investigation into the alleged embezzlement of European funds. Dragnea has dismissed all the accusations, however, blaming them on a "parallel state" that is trying to take over the country. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- November 26th, more than 20,000 people joined an anti-government protest in Bucharest. Thousands others went to the streets in other Romanian cities, including Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca, Brasov, Iasi, and Constanta. They shouted against the governing Social Democratic Party (PSD). The protesters want the Parliament to drop several controversial changes to the justice laws and to vote against the Government's recent fiscal changes. (www.romania-insider.com, www.news.ro)

SERBIA: November 22nd, Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic stated from Buenos Aires during a speech that Serbia will not recognize Kosovo for the sake of joining the EU adding that full membership in the EU is his country's absolute foreign policy priority. More specifically Dacic said *"We want to reach agreement, we want a unique and lasting solution, but we will never recognize unilateral acts - never, not even at the cost of failing to join the European Union"*. (www.b92.net, www.tanjug.rs)

- November 22nd, Serbian Foreign Ministry made a statement on Ukrainian Ambassador to Belgrade complaints that Serbian authorities refuse to meet him last 14 months. According to the Serbian

Ministry the Ukrainian Ambassador adopts an undiplomatic and unacceptable stance over Serbia by public statements and assessments against Serbian foreign policy and officials. More specifically the Ministry mentioned that on November 16th, 2017 the Ukrainian Ambassador said in interview in the Serbian newspaper Blic that *"Putin will sell you out"* while in a recent review he stated that *"Russia uses Serbia to create chaos in the Balkans"*. Moreover the Serbian Ministry emphasized that Ukraine maintained a stance against the Serbian national interests regarding Kosovo although Serbia during the OSCE chairmanship demonstrated their commitment to a peaceful solution to the crisis in Ukraine, which Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin praised. The Ministry concluded by *"noting with regret the statement made by Ambassador Aleksandrovysh about the stance of his ministry being 'almost the same' as his own - but nevertheless remains committed to overcoming disagreements and improving bilateral relation."*. (www.b92.net)

- November 23rd, Albanian President Ilir Meta will be in Serbia on December 3rd and 4th, 2017 on "an unofficial visit" to the Medvedja municipality. During his visit to Medvedja, he will meet with municipal councilors and municipal officials from the ethnic Albanian community. The president of Albania will have unofficial meetings with Nebojsa Arsic, President of the municipality, and President of the Coordination Body for the Municipalities of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja Zoran Stankovic. (www.b92.net)

SLOVENIA: November 24th, according to the Slovenian Prime Minister Miro Cerar the European Commission President Jean-Claude

Juncker confirmed in Brussels that the Commission is seriously considering mediation to ensure the implementation of the arbitration decision on the border dispute between Slovenia. The Prime Minister explained that he talked with his Croatian counterpart, Andrej Plenkovic, and concluded that more efforts are needed at the expert level to prepare the appropriate basis for the meeting, in which they would discuss the implementation of the arbitration decision. (www.delo.si)

TURKEY: November 22nd, Leaders of Russia Vladimir Putin, Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iran Hassan Rouhani met in the Black Sea resort of Sochi looking for a peace settlement to end the six-year Syrian civil war. The three leaders announced an agreement to sponsor a conference aimed at achieving a peaceful settlement of the Syria war. The announcement underscored Russia's increasingly influential role in determining the outcome of the war, which appears to be winding down after nearly seven years. The summit between the three powers, all deeply involved in the conflict, was designed to pave the way for a settlement likely to leave Syria's Russian and Iranian backed President, Bashar al-Assad, in power within a reformed Syrian constitution. The Sochi announcement also came a few days after Putin met with Assad of Syria; an indication that Assad had agreed to the idea. But in a sign of the difficulties ahead, Erdogan insisted Syrian Kurds are excluded from the congress on the grounds that the Kurds are linked with Turkish Kurdish groups that Turkey claims are terrorists. Syrian Kurds have been instrumental in the defeat of Isis as part of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces. Erdogan was once one of the main backers of the splintered Syrian opposition but is

now primarily focused on what Turkey sees as the Kurdish threat on its border. (www.nytimes.com, www.theguardian.com)



Leaders of Russia Vladimir Putin, Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iran Hassan Rouhani
(Photo source: www.nytimes.com)

- November 26th, Turkish officials said that expect the US will keep its President's Donald Trump promise to stop supporting the Syrian Kurds and their military organization YPG with weapons. Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım said Turkey expects an *"immediate ending" of Washington's cooperation with the PKK's Syrian offshoot, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and its armed wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG), as promised by Trump, and to start working again with its actual ally.*" On Friday November 24th, 2017, Trump said in a phone call with President Erdogan the U.S. administration will no longer deliver weapons to the YPG. (www.dailysabah.com)

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