



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

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ALBANIA: November 20th, Albanian President Ilir Meta spoke on Tuesday about a criminal effort from both Albanian and international representatives to capture the establishment of the Constitutional Court, during a meeting with opposition leaders on the topic of naming the new Court members. He said he will undertake any action to prevent what he considers a constitutional coup. He stated at the opening of the meeting that he had called on opposition leaders to provide details *“of the latest and best-structured, in my view, Albanian-international criminal attempt to capture the Constitutional Court and hand it over to Edi Rama so he can transform the most important state institution into a mocking institution.”* Meta, according to a press release, spoke of manipulation of the process of appointments to the Constitutional Court, aiming to *“capture the Court through the abduction of the President’s constitutional right to make appointments.”* During Tuesday’s meeting, according to the announcement distributed by the Presidency, Meta stated that *“I will not allow anyone to neutralize the powers of the President of the Republic, as the Constitution of the country recognizes, and that he will take any action to stop this constitutional coup.”* But the topic of the Constitutional Court was not the only discussed during the meeting. Leader of opposition Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD), Lulzim Basha indicated that the country’s political crisis and the electoral reform process were also discussed. According to him, *“there is and there cannot be an alibi to delay early parliamentary elections and local constitutional elections on the same day as the only way out of the crisis.”* Meta, during the meeting, also *“welcomed the steps taken by the*

opposition to adopt without delay the electoral reform, as well as the public stand of the united opposition to hold early elections, in order to restore the lack of legitimacy of the Albanian Parliament and to restore political dialogue in institutions,” the presidency announced. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- November 22nd, the President of Albania, Ilir Meta, held an extraordinary speech at the Presidency and said that citizens must take their fate in their own hands. Meta said that there is a severe violation of the Constitution, with the Parliament having less than 140 MPs, and with the citizens living without a Constitutional and Supreme Court. The Prosecutor General, according to Meta, a term that is not recognized in the Constitution, has been elected against the Constitution for reaching specific results. *“The Parliament has approved 20 anti-constitutional initiatives while the citizens’ rights are being violated. The country is losing population and there is a lack of serious, foreign investments from the USA, Germany and Great Britain,”* Meta said. *“The citizens must take fate in their own hands and defend the Constitution. The President will request the support of the Albanian people in a referendum for protecting the republic. Let the people decide whether they want the country to go towards dictatorship, or if they want to defend the Constitution, the future of the country. Albania first,”* Meta declared. (www.top-channel.tv)

- November 22nd, the US State Department said that they are aware of the comments made by the Albanian President, Ilir Meta, and said that they are following situation very closely. After the recommendation made yesterday by the US Embassy in Tirana to address the Venice Commission for an opinion, Meta said that

Albania should stop being a state of Embassies, and start becoming a state of the rule of law. The Spokesperson of the State Department told the Voice of America that respecting of the law comes above everything else, and this is something that Meta also agreed with during today's declaration. (www.top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Albanian President with his provocative statements escalates situation in the country. His call to citizens for "taking their fate in their hands" raises concerns regarding political stability and security in Albania. The US expressed its concern claiming that "follows situation in Albania closely." The ongoing political crisis is expected to become deeper strengthening instability and uncertainty. Violent protests could not be excluded especially if Rama refuses to listen public demands and use Police violence against civilians. Both, the President and Prime Minister are acting in "the edge of constitutional order" undermining country's political order. The Government is accused of having links with organized crime and current situation raises questions over the power of "Albanian mafia" in the country and its influence in state's politics. Undoubtedly, corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state's problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU. What really needs the country is political stability and constitutional order for moving ahead with reforms. Potential election of Albin Kurti as the new Kosovo Prime Minister is a new challenge for Albania. His calls for unification of Albania and Kosovo may become a factor of destabilization and tension in the wider region of Southeastern Europe bringing Albania in the

center of negative developments. Besides, the state maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

November 19th, the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, at an extraordinary session held on Tuesday in Sarajevo, decided to appoint Zoran Tegeltija as Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



The Bosnia's Chairman of the Council of Ministers designate, Zoran Tegeltija
(Photo source: www.narodnaskupstinars.net)

In the same session, BiH's Presidency decided to submit the document Reform Program of Bosnia and Herzegovina to NATO Headquarters in Brussels, within one day after the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly confirmed the appointment of the Chairman and Ministers of the BiH Council of Ministers. BiH Presidency held a meeting with the Ambassadors of the Quinto countries (US, Italy, France, UK, Germany) and the Head of the EU Delegation to BiH. Last week the Alliance of

Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD), submitted the names of members for the formation of Commissions, which blocked the work of the BiH Parliament after almost a year since it was constituted, News Agency Patria reports. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- November 19th, the US Embassy in Sarajevo welcomed on Tuesday the agreement between members of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency to support Zoran Tegeltija for the Prime Minister and for the Government to finally be formed. *“We welcome the agreement reached by the members of the Presidency, which achieves the key objectives of Government formation and continuing BiH's partnership and cooperation with NATO. It will also unlock much-needed defense reforms,”* the Embassy tweeted. The problem occurred after the current Chairman-designate said he would not prioritize Bosnia's NATO accession process or its cooperation with the Alliance, to which the Croat and Bosniak (Muslim Bosnian) Presidency members, Zeljko Komsic and Sefik Dzaferovic, said he would not get their support unless NATO gets back on the agenda. Serb Presidency member Milorad Dodik then said he would not propose anyone else nor would he or his party, the strongest Bosnian Serb party; the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD) change their position regarding NATO. The deadlock lasted until Tuesday when the Bosniak and Croat members agreed to support Zoran Tegeltija, who also comes from the SNSD, and in return the Serb Presidency member supported the submission of the *“document”* to NATO, thus removing all the obstacles from further reforms in the country. Later in the day the OSCE also voiced their support for this

agreement, saying it is good for both the upcoming reforms in Bosnia and its citizens. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- November 24th, thanking members of the *‘Bosniak political elite’* for agreeing on the final document that will be sent to NATO to continue Bosnia's cooperation with the Alliance, the Serb member of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency, Milorad Dodik, said Sunday that the document does not mean the activation of the Membership Action Plan. *“We need to prepare complete and comprehensive information with our coalition partners regarding the defense system and to inform the Republika Srpska (RS) National Assembly of this. The document is not active; it will be activated from the moment the Council of Ministers (Bosnian government) is elected. Only then can we talk about the document,”* Dodik said. *“I am also grateful to the partners from the Bosniak political elite, who even before this document indicated that there would be no (NATO) membership without the will of the Serbs. It would require a new decision.”* He noted that only after the document is made public, then they should provide a comprehensive insight into everything, as proof of the fact that the Reform Plan is not contrary to the RS entity's policy of military neutrality. Bosnia's tripartite Presidency expressed its support for Zoran Tegeltija to serve as Bosnia's Prime Minister during last week's special session. The Bosniak and Croat Presidency members finally expressed support for Tegeltija, a member of the strongest Bosnian Serb party - the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD) - following a joint meeting with Ambassadors of the US, Italy, France, the UK, Germany and the Head of the EU Delegation to

Bosnia. In return, the Serb Presidency member supported a document outlining the program of reforms in the field of defense and security, which was sent to NATO, instead of the Annual National Program (ANP). This new document is said to be acceptable to NATO as if it was the original ANP. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country is going to have a new federal Government since October 7th, 2018 elections. An agreement was reached finally since the three parties overcame their disputes. Bosniak and Croat members of the tripartite presidency accepted the Bosnian Serb Zoran Tegeltija as the new Chairman of the Council of Ministers, while Bosnian Serb leader agreed the country to send a letter to NATO for continuation of their cooperation. Complaints were broken out by Bosnian Serb opposition claiming that Milorad Dodik allowed Bosnia to enter NATO. However, Dodik claims that he did not violate his entity's decision for military neutrality. Nevertheless, political situation in Bosnia remains alarming and at the moment it is considered as the most dangerous for a violent turbulence or a conflict in the region. Neighboring Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs, while Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments. Russia tries to "penetrate" in Bosnian affairs maintaining its influence in Southeastern Europe. Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. EU path is too long

for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU.



BULGARIA: November 18th, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov had a telephone conversation with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, the Government press office reported. *"I highly value NATO's role in protecting our security, freedom and democratic values. For us, Bulgaria's national security and defense are ensured only within the framework of NATO's collective defense,"* Borissov told Stoltenberg. The two spoke on the eve of the NATO Summit of Heads of State or Government, which will be held on December 3rd – 4th, 2019 in London. Bulgaria's Prime Minister said that given today's risks and challenges to the international security, this country views the unity of Europe and North America as more important than ever. *"For Bulgaria, the transatlantic link is at the heart of our collective defense,"* Borissov said. In his conversation with Stoltenberg, the Prime Minister noted that since the beginning of 2018, Bulgaria has successfully been implementing the plans for increasing the defense expenditure until 2024. *"With the advance payment of 8 F-16V Block 70 aircrafts, this objective has already been achieved, and by the end of 2019, spending is expected to reach 3.1% of GDP,"* Borissov said. He told Stoltenberg that the country's goals are focused on three main areas - increasing defense spending, modernization and rearmament, and overcoming the shortage of personnel in the Armed Forces. *"Bulgaria will continue to support the Alliance's efforts to achieve global peace and security. We consider our participation in NATO missions and operations a top priority and intend to maintain*

our commitment and contribution to them,” Borissov said. (www.novinite.com)

- November 20th, National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (Национален фронт за спасение на България - NFSB), leader Valery Simeonov, was elected Deputy Chairman of the 44th National Assembly. His nomination was accepted by 118 votes in favor, 6 votes against, and 6 abstentions, according to FOCUS News Agency. The draft decision was tabled yesterday by the co-chairs of the United Patriots Groups and was included in Parliament’s agenda for today. MPs of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi – DPS) left the plenary and did not participate in the debate or the vote. Following the news, dozens of people gathered to protest in front of the National Assembly against the election of Valery Simeonov. (www.novinite.com)

- November 24th, Serbian MP Milovan Drecun, who is believed to be close to Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, said on November 22nd, 2019 that Bulgaria was conducting hybrid attacks in Serbia. Because of that, the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called on the Serbian Ambassador to Bulgaria, Vladimir Curgus for an explanation, BNT reported. Drecun told broadcaster RTS that it should be sought who could possibly have an interest and the resource to make the video, showing a former Russian Deputy Defense Attache in Belgrade, identified as Lieutenant Colonel Georgy Kleban, giving cash to a Serbian retired Lieutenant Colonel. According to Drecun, the Bulgarian services could be interested. He directly accused Bulgaria of having a joint intelligence center together with North Macedonia, Croatia and Germany in Skopje for such operations. Bulgaria’s Deputy Prime

Minister and Minister of Defense Krassimir Karakachanov said that Drecun's accusations do not correspond to the truth. *“The fact that Serbia is having problems does not mean that Bulgaria should be a scapegoat, serving to deflect attention from its internal problems,”* the Deputy PM pointed out. This is the second scandal this year in which Serbia involves Bulgaria. In mid-summer, Deputy Prime Minister Ivica Dacic created diplomatic tensions with his comments about Prime Minister Boyko Borissov. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Boyko Borissov Government is stable. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country’s development and should be addressed decisively. The country pays special attention to energy security developing several projects. However, there are concerns regarding energy diversification since there is a risk the Bulgarian energy sector to become fully dependant by Russia. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). However, military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards. The country claims that in 2020 the defense budget will reach 3% of GDP.



CROATIA: November 21st, the Government has come to an agreement with state servant's unions regarding their collective agreement. A compromise was reached in quickening the dynamics of payments for base salaries and it was agreed that Christmas bonuses

and holiday pays of 1,500 kuna would be paid. *“I can say that we reached a high level of agreement, naturally the same agreement needs to pass through union committees and in the same manner the Croatian Government, but I have no doubt in that part. We accepted the demands of the unions and agreed on dynamics in which the first increase of 2% will be on January 1st, the second increase will be on June 1st and the third increase on October 1st,”* said Labor Minister Josip Aladrović following the meeting. *“Once it is going to the committees it means that we have managed to come to a certain level of agreement that will enable the possible signing of such an agreement. What we asked for was firstly a question of dynamics in payment of base salary increases in 2020. As far as non-material and material rights are concerned, such as Christmas bonuses and holiday pays, we agreed that each would be 1,500 kuna. In the same manner we agreed that the gift for children at Christmas will be raised from 500 to 600 kuna,”* said the Head of the State Servants Union Boris Plesa. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- November 21st, three Croatian Air Force pilots from the Zemunik airbase are under investigation by civilian and military Police. They are suspected of transporting a 36 year old man who has been brought into connection with illegal arms dealing, by Croatian Air Force helicopter, two months ago while on duty. In order to hide their activity the pilots allegedly had the man put on the uniform of a military pilot. *“Today, once again in the name of the entire Croatian military, all soldiers, NCO's, officers and pilots, as well as myself, I apologize to all. These are not the values of the triumphant Croatian military; every infringement has a name and last name. As far as*

I am concerned, and I repeated this yesterday, there is a zero tolerance for non-military and punishable behavior,” said Minister of Defense Damir Krstičević. President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović has said that she expects a quick investigation of all facts regarding the incident and adequate sanctioning of illegal actions. If the incident proves to be true she will demand strict penalties, including dishonorable discharges. The President's office said that she will not allow a small group of people to tarnish the impeccable image of the Armed Forces. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- November 23rd, President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović said on Saturday that it was completely clear that the Slovenian state apparatus had been used to influence the outcome of international arbitration proceedings in the Croatian - Slovenian border dispute and that the dispute could be settled only bilaterally. Grabar-Kitarović made the statement in a comment on a report by a Slovenian Commission which shows that Slovenian state institutions had covered up unlawful communication between an arbitration agent and an arbitral judge. *“Slovenia has finally admitted the scandalous activities that resulted in the failure of the arbitration proceedings. It is now entirely clear that the Slovenian state apparatus was used to influence the outcome of the arbitration proceedings. Arbitration is long dead, and the dispute can be resolved only bilaterally,”* Grabar-Kitarović said on social media. The Vecernji List daily of Saturday said that the report in question showed that by using intelligence services, the Slovenian state had participated in the covering up of communication between Slovenian arbitration agent Simona Drenik and arbitral judge Jernej Sekolec, with the

Slovenian intelligence agency SOVA starting to prepare for arbitration in early 2009 while the arbitration agreement was signed in the autumn that year. The daily says that the report by the Slovenian parliamentary Commission for the oversight of intelligence services proves beyond doubt that the Slovenian side had used the state apparatus and its secret services for the purpose of arbitration fraud. Croatian Foreign Minister Gordan Grlic Radman believes that this paves the way to settling the border dispute bilaterally. "... the Slovenian side has really admitted its own mistake and responsibility. I believe that that is a good way to return to the negotiating table and start negotiations because this is a bilateral issue," Grlic Radman told reporters in Zagreb on Saturday. "As regards Croatia, goodwill has always existed. I believe that together with our Slovenian neighbors and friends we will find an appropriate solution," the Minister said. The Croatian Parliament in late July 2015 adopted a unanimous decision to withdraw from the border arbitration agreement the two countries had signed in 2009 after Slovenia irreparably compromised the proceedings, and it proposed launching talks on an alternative way to settle the dispute. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country enjoys political stability and adoption of 2020 state budget confirmed that the ruling coalition is stable. Croatia is moving ahead for the presidential elections, scheduled on December 22nd, 2019 (first round) and January 5th, 2020 (second round if necessary). In this context, the Government tries to close successfully all "fronts" mainly with workers. Croatia received a positive recommendation by the

European Commission for implementing all necessary criteria for entering the Schengen Zone. However, the final political decision by the member states requires a unanimous vote and it is expected to become a field of confrontation between Croatia and Slovenia. Slovenia has already expressed its intention to block Croatia's accession to the Schengen Area due to their border dispute. However, Croatia expresses confidence that finally it will get full support (Slovenia including) for entering the Zone. Croatia implements a hard-line foreign policy with its neighboring countries maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.



CYPRUS: November 20th, the Armed Forces of Cyprus and Israel successfully carried out on Wednesday their joint military exercise "Onisilos-Gideon 2019" according to an announcement by the Defense Ministry. The exercise was held as part of the annual military cooperation program between the two countries, it added. The three-day exercise took place within Nicosia Flight Information Region (FIR) and in a large area of the national airspace and territory of Cyprus, using equipment and aircraft of the National Guard and various types of aircraft of the Israeli Air Force. The Defense Ministry said the successful conclusion of the exercise proves the enhanced training level and operational readiness of the National Guard, and the close cooperation with friendly neighboring countries in

dealing with modern security challenges and asymmetric threats in the Eastern Mediterranean. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- November 22nd, November 25th, 2019 meeting in Berlin between President Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci is an important opportunity for the parties to see what the next steps should be, the Government Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said on Friday. *“We have said from the beginning that it is indeed an important opportunity,”* Prodromou said. *“The President is treating it as an opportunity where the (UN) Secretary General will examine with the two leaders what the next steps should be.”* The Greek Cypriot side’s position is that common ground can be found for the resumption of talks and soon afterwards there can be an informal meeting with the participation of the guarantor powers, the Spokesman said. *“The President is going (to the Berlin meeting) not just to keep the process going, but to start negotiations as soon as possible,”* he added. The latest round of talks between the two sides broke down in 2017. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- November 24th, we are going to Berlin with an open agenda so we can set together a new road map, to discuss the steps to be taken from here forward, Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci said on Sunday as he was leaving the island. He was heading to Berlin for a meeting on Monday evening with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades. Akinci said his stance from the beginning had been realistic which does not veer from the outlines of the UN, in support of a bi-zonal bi-communal federation (BBF) based on two equal communities, politically balanced that take part in decisions. He said open ended talks

should be a thing of the past and what is needed is a results-focused, well-prepared and well-separated process. *“There is material pointing the way to a solution. This is the joint announcement of February 11th, 2014, the framework of June 30th, 2017 and the convergences that have been achieved to date,”* he said. The interest shown by Guterres in solving the Cyprus problem is very important, Akinci said, adding that it is the UNSG who suggested Monday’s meeting. It would not be wrong to say, he added, that it would be to the benefit of both sides, given the intensity and developments in the eastern Mediterranean, to fairly share the natural wealth that exists in the seas around the island. *“For this we need co-operation, we need dialogue. I believe the UNSG is worried about everything that is going on around Cyprus and in different parts of the world, but especially the Middle East. This is a reasonable worry and to get over it the correct path is to create the grounds for negotiations,”* Akinci said. But, he said, negotiations should not take place just for the sake of it. *“We want a solution. We want this solution to bring peace to both communities on the island. We want to bring Turkey - Greece relations to a better level. In short, we want peace and stability on our island to have peace and stability in the region,”* he concluded. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Although invasion of Turkish drillship Yavuz in Cypriot EEZ continues challenging the state’s sovereignty, Cypriot authorities focus on restarting of peace talks. The tripartite meeting (UN, Republic of Cyprus, and Turkish Cypriot community) is scheduled for November 25th, 2019 in Berlin and both Cypriot President Nicos

Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Acinci are expecting a base for further dialogue to be established and a five parties meeting to be organized in the near future starting from coming December (2019). The truth is that it is not very likely to see such a meeting in the near future since no progress has been made so far and Turkey continues to challenge the Cypriot sovereignty. Bi-communal and bi-zonal federation is the basis for a negotiation, according to Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot officials. However, it is disputable the administrative model. Lack of military power and more specifically aeronautical power is critical for Turkish uncontrolled action within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Cyprus continues to work by diplomatic means on resolving the crisis but the fact is that Turkey has consolidated its presence in the Cypriot waters. Current situation has not only political and diplomatic repercussions, but also economic ones. Turkey rejects any possibility of unilateral (by Cyprus) exploitation of hydrocarbons within EEZ without equal participation of the Turkish Cypriot community. The presence of Turkish drill ships accompanied by warships forced oil companies to reconsider their activity in Cypriot waters due to safety reasons. EU has announced restrictive measures against individuals and companies related to illegal Turkish drilling in the eastern Mediterranean. As long as tension remains in eastern Mediterranean, there is always a high risk of an armed "hot" incident or a conflict. It is certain that Turkey will not accept "fait accompli" in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing

direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: November 18th, Turkish aircraft on Monday carried out 32 violations of Greek national airspace in the northeastern, central and southeastern Aegean, according to Greek defense officials. The Turkish jets – six F-16s, two F-4s and four CN-235s – also carried out 11 transgressions of the Athens Flight Information Region (FIR), according to defense sources which said that six of the Turkish fighter jets were armed. All Turkish aircrafts were intercepted in line with international rules of engagement while Greek and Turkish jets engaged in four mock dogfights, defense sources said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- November 20th, the Greek Government announced on Wednesday plans to set up five closed pre-departure centers for migrants on the Aegean islands of Samos, Chios, Lesbos, Kos and Leros. According to the plan, which was announced on Wednesday by Government spokesman Stelios Petsas and Deputy Minister of National Defense Alkiviadis Stefanis, the new centers will host between 1,000 and 5,000 people and they will replace the open camps such as Moria and Vathy. The conservative Government is seeking to manage a recent surge in migrant flows through a mix of measures, including tighter border controls and speeding up asylum procedures and returns. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- November 20th, the Citizens' Protection Ministry called on squatters to evacuate any state or privately owned building within two weeks as the Government steps up its efforts to clear old buildings in central Athens of illegal occupants.

According to a press release issued by the Ministry, occupied buildings that are housing refugees and migrants will be contacted by the Ministry's relevant service in order for the migrants to be transferred to camps on the mainland. The Ministry also said that if the buildings in question are privately owned, squatters should contact the legal owners and agree to a leasing arrangement. Authorities have cleared several occupied buildings in recent months including four in the anarchist stronghold of Exarchia in downtown Athens, the focus of the conservative Government's law and order crackdown. Many of the occupied buildings in Exarchia have hosted migrants that have been reluctant to move to state camps on the islands and mainland. Some of the squats are likely to be more of a challenge than others to clear. The "Vox" building in Exarchia Square, which serves as the informal headquarters of the "Rouvikonas" anarchist group, is a case in point. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Greece enjoys political stability. The Government implements a plan of restoring "law and order" in the country, mainly in Athens which has seriously damaged last 5 years during the left-wing party of SYRIZA governance. In this context, security forces have conducted several operations either in buildings in Exarchia region (considered as the "fortress" of anarchists in Athens) or in other places. It is assessed that the ultimatum issued by the Ministry of Citizen's Protection against anarchists to evacuate all buildings are illegally occupied within 15 days will bring clashes with Police forces and turbulence in the Greek capital. There are security concerns of

escalation of tension between security forces and radical leftish groups especially on December 6th, 2019. It should be noted that Greece is one of the last European countries faces domestic activity by left-ideology terrorists. Parliamentary Investigative Committee has started questioning witnesses of the "Novartis" bribery case investigating if former Alternate Justice Minister, Dimitris Papangelopoulos interfered in the case pushing witnesses to testify against political opponents of SYRIZA. The case will remain in the central political scene in the near future as a source of tension. At the moment, migration is the main security problem of Greece. Good weather contributes in maintenance of a stable flow from Turkish coasts towards Greek islands. Control of migrant flows coming from Turkey is a critical point for Greek national security and consequently EU's security. The Government announced strict measures aiming to control the problem. In this context, it announced that 5 closed migrant centers will be activated in 5 islands (Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Kos and Leros), asylum procedures and returns will be accelerated, and border controls will be strengthened. Moreover, the Government and mainly the Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis strengthened his rhetoric calling the EU to support Greece which carries the migration burden alone. Greek – Turkish relations are in a critical point not only due to Turkey's decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills, but also because Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial and maritime sovereign rights. Greece is concerned due to Turkish intention to search for hydrocarbons within its EEZ near to Kastelorizo region. The critical question is "how Greece would react if a

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



KOSOVO: November 19th, the outgoing Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, addressed today journalists about the Balkan “mini-Schengen,” which he called a “Belgrade-based Russian and Chinese influence,” Gazeta Express reports. He said that “mini-Schengen” is not in Kosovo’s interest and has nothing to do with the visa liberalization process. Haradinaj said that “mini-Schengen” is just an expansion, which Serbian President Aleksandar

Vucic, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama and North Macedonia Prime Minister Zoran Zaev are inviting Kosovo to join in. “*It is not in Kosovo’s or Europe’s interest. Russia and China are installed in all aspects in Belgrade. Kosovo has no interest in expansion of Russian and Chinese influence in Europe,*” Haradinaj said. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- November 22nd, leader of the Self-Determination (Vetëvendosje) party and most likely new Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti said on Friday that President Hashim Thaci should resign or, as he said, would be relieved of duty, the news agencies reported, citing Pristina media. The Self-Determination and the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) who would attempt to form a coalition Government based on the results of the October 6th, 2019 general elections, also discussed Thaci’s position, local media said. “*President Thaci must resign or will be ousted,*” Kurti said. In an interview with Top Channel, Kurti added that the decreasing wish for national unification was caused by the territory swap idea, “*since people were not ready to give up on Mitrovica for the sake of the national unification.*” He said that “*many politicians in Kosovo speak about the territory swap, giving up on the north,*” adding that “*there was not a single official in Serbia who talked about the handout of the territory.*” (www.rs.n1info.com)

- November 22nd, Self-Determination (Vetëvendosje) leader Albin Kurti addressing media on Friday after a meeting with Isa Mustafa, leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) said that they agreed to reach an agreement three days after certification of elections results held on

October 6th, 2019. Kurti who is candidate for Prime Minister, said that they agreed with Mustafa to meet again next week. *“We had a constructive meeting with the LDK’s Chairman and at the same time working groups of both parties met to harmonize program of our future Government. We have discussed on election process and we agreed that one hour after certification of election results, we will meet and reach an agreement within three or four days,”* Kurti said. Kurti stated that the agreement on Government coalition has 26 pages. *“Our working groups will continue meetings on harmonization of Government program and until now we have 26 pages of text,”* Kurti said. Mustafa said the two parties have reached progress in harmonizing programs and agreed with Kurti that after certification of election results to talk on details of forming new Government. The LDK Chairman confirmed that they will discuss also with the Serbian List (Srpska Lista) adding however that it is up to Kurti who is mandated to form the new Government to take a decision. Mustafa said that during today’s meeting they have not discussed on ministerial posts. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Winners of the October 6th, 2019 early parliamentary elections, Vetëvendosje and LDK have reached an agreement of forming a Government and it is a matter of time its official announcement. Potential Prime Minister, Albin Kurti accuses certain circles in Kosovo including the President Hashim Thaci that they were preparing citizens for land swap with Serbia. In this context, he publically asked from Thaci to resign, or he will be forced to be ousted when Kurti will come to power. It seems that Kurti’s

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



MOLDOVA: November 19th, the change of Government in Moldova took place not without the participation of former Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova - PDM) leader, Vladimir Plahotniuc, maintains ex-Prime Minister, leader of the Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS) Maia Sandu. She said in an interview to the Romanian portal www.g4media.ro that she has no direct proofs except the information that President Igor Dodon's people were meeting with Plahotniuc. *"Dodon would be unable to dismiss the Government without the Democratic Party, while a part of PDM deputies are still being controlled by Plahotniuc It is for sure that he and his surrounding got guarantees from Dodon that they will not be prosecuted and they can return to corrupt schemes. Besides, the new Government was approved literally within a day. It is obvious that this could never happen without preliminary agreements. Negotiations started long ago and were the continuation of May –J une discussions between Dodon and Plahotniuc,"* Sandu maintains. She pointed that the new Government is made of Ministers and appointees of Plahotniuc, including head of the Cabinet of Ministers Ion Chicu. Also, the ex-premier regards as obvious that Moscow wants to see the consolidation of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM) in Moldova, though it does not know which role Russia played in Government's collapse. Still, everyone knows that Dodon is permanently receiving orders from Moscow concerning the political strategy. *"We never renounced power. Dodon and PDM decided to get rid of us, as they feared the consequences of*

our actions [de-oligarchization]. Dodon himself said in a TV program that the Sandu's Government will anyway fall. He had everything prepared beforehand," the ex-Premier repeated. (www.infotag.md)

- November 19th, new Moldovan Prime Minister Ion Chicu has stated that realization of the EU - Moldova Association Agreement is remaining a priority for the Government of the republic. Chicu confirmed this in the course of his meeting with Ambassador Peter Michalko, the Head of the EU Delegation to Moldova, the governmental press service reported. Chicu said *"The development of dialogue with the EU and implementation of the Association Agreement are remaining a priority for my Government. We are counting on dialogue continuation and development. We realize how important real reforms in this sphere are, and we are full of resolution to promote them. A particular attention shall be attached to the justice reform. The EU's assistance and expertise in this will be of a considerable importance for us."* Having expressed gratitude to the EU for its long-standing support for Moldova, the Prime Minister stressed that EU is an important-most external partner to Moldova. He assured that his Government will continue fulfilling necessary conditions for receiving macro-financial assistance. Michalko stressed that Moldova must continue fulfilling its commitments and the EU will continue following closely the Moldovan authorities' reform implementation actions. The diplomat stressed, in particular, the need for further realization of the judiciary reform, including the appointment of a Prosecutor General, struggle against corruption, ensuring of democracy, the supremacy of law and press freedom as well as continuation of the bank fraud

investigation. Chicu assured Michalko that his Government has both resolution and possibilities for the realization of the above-mentioned reforms, *“and this shall be proved by concrete deeds.”* Some Members of the European Parliament and EU officials perceived critically the change of Government in Moldova not only because Maia Sandu was a strongly pro-European premier but also because this post was given to Ion Chicu. Last few months, being a Presidential Adviser, Chicu stated repeatedly that Moldova can manage without foreign assistance. He also criticized EU’s actions and laid responsibility for the one billion dollar bank fraud on certain European officials. Upon appointment as Prime Minister, Chicu began complaining about *“distorted interpretations”* of his sayings. (www.infotag.md)

- November 20th, Prime Minister, Ion Chicu, has presented the results of his visit to Russia. The Head of Government has said that he discussed with the officials in Moscow on the gas price reduction, increasing the number of authorizations for Moldovan carriers and extending the spectrum of goods exported to Russia without taxes. *“The main result is that we have restored the normal, pragmatic and mutually advantageous dialogue with one of the main economic partners of Moldova. It is precisely on the basis of this dialogue that we shall be able to explore further the possibilities offered by this collaboration,”* stated Chicu. According to him, the Russian side has given assurances that it will make efforts that the new Government to promote reforms, including economic ones. *“Russia is also interested in our progress on justice reform, or serious private investment projects are to be launched in Moldova in perspectives and the*

functioning of justice depends on the desire of Russian companies to invest in Moldova,” said Prime Minister. Also, it has been launched the process of liberalizing foreign trade in the medium term in Moscow, so that all exports of Moldova and Russia would be carried out without customs duties. *“Until then, we have obtained the initial agreement of Russian authorities to expand the list of categories of goods that are exported to Russian market without customs duties from 5 to 10 categories. This will cover almost 70% of the list of products exported to Russian market,”* specified Chicu. The Prime Minister has also added that during the talks, it was obtained the initial agreement to extend the possibility of exports of Moldovan products to Russian market after January 1st, 2020 with no customs duties and expand the number of Moldovan companies authorized to export to the Russian market. Regarding the issue of international carriers that could not operate on the Russian market due to insufficient transport authorizations, Chicu has announced that Russian side will offer in the coming days a thousand authorizations so that by the end of the year the exports of products from Moldova on Russian market to be unlocked. As a result of talks, it has been obtained the major agreement of the Russian side to open a credit line of about 500 million dollars; money that will be directed exclusively for investment projects. The parties have also agreed to launch preparatory actions upon implementation of initiative to use ammunition stored in Cobasna. *“We shall get more details from Russian side on its mechanism in upcoming period, which is to be a transparent one, including all partners of Moldova,”* rounded up Chicu. (www.moldpres.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Moldovan President, Igor Dodon is the absolute dominant in state's politics. He achieved to topple the Government and to form a Government with members of his absolute trust, enjoying PDM's support. ACUM block was defeated in the domestic political chessboard and lost power. Moscow has also reasons to be satisfied with Moldovan political developments. It is not a coincidence that the new Prime Minister, Ion Chicu's first visit was in Russia. EU and the US, expressed their concern over the current political crisis. Sandu's pro-western policy stopped abruptly, while she implied that without ACUM in the Government EU and US economic assistance may be revoked. In this context, Chicu reassured Head of EU delegation in Moldova, Peter Michalko that the new Government remains committed in implementing the EU – Moldova Association Agreement. Russia is closely following political developments in Moldova as it is considered as a pivotal country for Russian national security. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: November 18th, Minister of Defense, Predrag Boskovic, is in Dubai currently, where he met with US Assistant Secretary of the Army, Bruce D. Jette and Director General for material resources in the Ministry of Defense of Spain, Admiral Santiago Ramon Gonzales Gomez. Boskovic stressed that the US was Montenegro's most important strategic partner and added that there was room for the expansion of cooperation. He also pointed out that Montenegro remained main advocate of NATO open door policy and that the country would continue to support implementation of

necessary reforms in the countries with NATO aspirations. Interlocutors hope the coming NATO Summit in London will contribute to further harmonization of ally efforts in countering security threats. During the meeting with Admiral Gomez, Boskovic informed his interlocutor about the priorities of the modernization of the Armed Forces of Montenegro, while putting special emphasis on the strategic framework and strengthening interoperability level. Minister pointed out that it was necessary to consider new modalities of defense cooperation. Gomez said Spanish Defense Ministry would support further development of Montenegro's defense capacities. (www.cdm.me)

- November 19th, President of the Social Democratic Party of Montenegro (Socijaldemokratska Partija Crne Gore - SDP) Draginja Vuksanovic-Stankovic said the caretaker Government was a key condition for fair elections and control of the entire electoral process. In an interview with Radio Montenegro she said that the adoption of electoral laws is a complicated issue. She recalled that the SDP did not support the extension of the Electoral Reform Committee's deadline. *"In order to have elections in accordance with democratic standards, the Government has to understand that there is a huge amount of mistrust because of the numerous affairs of the Government. The Video Clip affair is not resolved, we have the Envelope affair. The DPS does not show willingness to show the basic principle of political responsibility,"* Vuksanovic-Stankovic said. Speaking about participation in the elections if there is no caretaker Government, Vuksanovic-Stankovic said that they had not discussed it yet at the party institutions, but SDP is always in favor of dialogue. (www.rtcg.me)

- November 19th, Montenegro Defense Minister Predrag Boskovic met with Minister of State for Defense Affairs in UAE Mohammed bin Ahmed Al Bowardi on the occasion of Dubai Airshow 2019. Boskovic emphasized that it was necessary to improve cooperation between the two countries, especially concerning the modernization and equipping the Armed Forces. He also stressed that the Montenegrin Ministry of Defense continuously strives to boost bilateral defense cooperation with the allied countries and its partners as well. *“With a view of this, Minister Boskovic emphasized that modernization of the Army still represents one of the top priorities of the Ministry of Defense, especially in terms of equipping in line with the highest standards and current security challenges,”* the Ministry of Defense said in a statement. Al Bowardi underlined the active contribution of our country in improving global stability. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension and abnormality continues as ruling DPS insists that there is no need for a transitional Government rejecting opposition’s request. Opposition appears divided strengthening ruling DPS’s power. A possible boycott by opposition of the next parliamentary elections will have negative impact in country’s political stability, consolidation of democracy, and economic growth. EC hardens its stance towards Montenegro’s EU accession process (as it was expected). A non-paper expresses concerns over rule of law in the country; most specifically is focusing on judiciary, media and fight against corruption. Although the Government tries to appear calm, the fact is that concerns have been raised in the country for its EU route. In this

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



NORTH MACEDONIA:

November 19th, North Macedonia produced solid results in the fight against corruption. However, the judiciary needs to be transformed to be made more efficient in line with the European standards and values, concluded Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and EU Commissioner Vera Jourova at a meeting in Skopje. A sustainable solution is needed, in a transparent and professional way, for the judiciary to produce capacity, the Government’s press

service said today. *“At the meeting, respect was paid for the achievements of Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and those of the Government reform-wise. It was concluded that the Prespa Agreement is a rare and positive example of building friendships – opposite existing policies of radicalism and nationalism – that is also affirmed by the new members of the European Commission. The message is: the Republic of North Macedonia moves into the right direction and its active cooperation with the Commission will continue,”* said the press release. According to Zaev, reforms, especially in the judiciary, are key not only to benefit the EU integration process, but also to improve the economy, which is marking growth. Zaev and Jourova, who is the European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, discussed the work of the new European Commission, which is expected to focus on a positive agenda, on topical issues, including climate change, digital transformation, and migration strategy. *“Active cooperation with Commissioner Jourova will continue as regards rule of law, protection of democracy and elections, especially given the fact that she will take up the portfolio of European values and transparency, which is of major importance for the citizens in North Macedonia,”* reads the press release. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- November 19th, the Appellate Court in Skopje accepted the appeal by former Special Prosecutor Katica Janeva and replaced detention order with house arrest. *“The first-instance decision has been altered and house arrest has been ordered, accompanied by precautionary measures,”* informs the Court. Katica Janeva is a defendant in money extortion case, commonly referred to as the *“Racket”* case, alongside 1TV owner Bojan

Jovanovski (aka Boki 13) and businessman Zoran Milevski-Kicheec.

- November 21st, France’s National Assembly ratified North Macedonia’s NATO Accession Protocol at a plenary session on Thursday. The bill to approve the ratification of North Macedonia’s NATO accession protocol, presented by the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, was on top of the agenda at Thursday’s plenary session. Following a debate attended by representatives from all political groups, France’s National Assembly gave the green light for North Macedonia’s NATO accession protocol. The debate at the National Assembly took place following the ratification of NATO’s protocol by the French Senate on October 17th, 2019. Only after all 29 NATO member states ratify North Macedonia’s NATO accession protocol, it will enter into force enabling the country to become the Alliance’s 30th member. According to the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, North Macedonia’s NATO accession would strengthen security in the region and the Alliance as a whole. France would remain vigilant over key principles of the NATO enlargement process, which include assessment of candidate countries’ values and contribution to security in the Euro-Atlantic area. Following France’s ratification, the country’s NATO’s protocol remains to be ratified by Spain. (www.nezavisen.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Early parliamentary elections are scheduled for April 12th, 2020, while an interim Government is expected to be formed on January 3rd, 2020. Undoubtedly, North Macedonia has entered in political uncertainty and instability. Russia is trying to fill in the “political gap” in Western

Balkans, but western forces are on alert to prevent it. It should be noted that the dilemma EU opening accession negotiations or Russian influence is not a realistic one since the country has already entered NATO (the process is ongoing but almost to be concluded since only Spain has remained to ratify the accession) which is a major step towards the full integration into the western security system. North Macedonia is seeking to officially enter the Alliance in coming summit on December 3rd – 4th, 2019 in London, but it is assessed that time limits this option. The country should focus on reforms regarding justice, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, administration, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process. North Macedonia's politics are still shaken by a series of corruption and extortion scandals undermining not only country's political stability, but also its European perspective. Fancy names such as "Extortion", "Empire", "Racket", "Titanic", "Monster" are nothing more than scandals involving politicians, businessmen, criminals, and judicial servants demonstrating that corruption, absence of rule of law and non transparency dominate in state's function. It should be noted that Justice moves slowly towards full investigation of these scandals.



ROMANIA: November 19th,

Romanian President Klaus Iohannis answered questions related to education, justice, transport infrastructure and foreign policy during his debate with journalists organized on Tuesday evening. He also said that he will communicate more with the citizens if he wins a second mandate, and presented a brief review of his first mandate.

Iohannis said, at the beginning of the debate, that he intended at the start of his first term to be another kind of President, one that builds and generates solutions, but that he had to face a hostile Social Democratic Party's (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) that "came with an approach that threw us all into chaos, threw Romania into chaos." "I managed to oppose the PSD long enough to keep Romania on the European path, in the area of European values. I managed to save Romania's image through foreign policy, to counteract the toxic effects abroad of a PSD Government focused on capturing the state," Iohannis said. Answering a question about the judiciary system in Romania, the president said "Without me, the rule of law in Romania would have been broken. Fight against corruption continued and I fixed the catastrophic image projected by the PSD Governments abroad," the President explained, adding that he managed to cancel 70% of the measures promoted by PSD that would have compromised the laws of justice. Romania will organize the second round of the presidential elections on Sunday, November 24th, 2019 with the Romanians living abroad having three days to vote (Friday, Saturday and Sunday). The two candidates are incumbent president Klaus Iohannis, supported by National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL), and Viorica Dancila, supported by PSD. (www.romania-insider.com)

- November 21st, Social Democratic Party's (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) Chairwoman Viorica Dancila has announced that her party will file a simple motion in Parliament against the new Liberal Finance Minister, Florin Cițu, on the euro increase. "The euro increase is affecting Romanians," argues Dancila. In retort,

Cițu said in a social media post that he will come before Parliament with “*all Directors from the Ministry of Finance and from the National Agency for Fiscal Administration (ANAF) who worked with his predecessor Eugen Teodorovici and with Darius Valcov.*” Cițu said Chiefs in these institutions will also bring data and documents that will reveal “*who’s lying to Romanians,*” while the result of his action “*will be unpleasant to Dancila and Teodorovici.*” “*Viorica Dancila and Eugen Teodorovici knew since March they will exceed the deficit target and the situation of the budgetary execution and particularly the forecast for the year-end when I took over the mandate,*” the Finance Minister said. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- November 22nd, President Klaus Iohannis has called on Romanians on Thursday to turn out to vote on Sunday, adding that the Social Democratic Party’s (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) “*has changed many times its faces, but never its habit,*” and that is why it must be sent in Opposition. “*Even if you or the others may think that the PSD is not so bad, in reality, the PSD has changed its faces many times, but never its habit. This is why, PSD must be sent in opposition for many years, and for that to happen we need to turn out to vote and we need to obtain such a clear vote so that no one ever questions whether the PSD returns or not,*” Iohannis told a meeting with his supporters in Galati. “*The heroes of the elections are people with the voting stamp in their hand,*” he emphasized. “*It is very important to vote because we want to make Romania better, normal, we want to have institutions working for the citizen, good schools for Romanian children, modern hospitals for Romanians, infrastructure which truly leads to the development of regions. I*

would like Moldova to be connected to the rest of the country through a motorway, railway, so that investors come here, too, so you can have better paid jobs and people understand that Romania is part of the developed part of Europe. I do not want Romanians to feel inferior to those in Western Europe,” Iohannis argued. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The second round of presidential election is scheduled for November 24th, 2019 with Iohannis being the potential winner. Romania got a PNL interim Government with its leader, Ludovik Orban as the new Prime Minister. However, the new Government is a weak minority Government and it is doubtful if it will achieve to handle serious state’s issues such as the 2020 budget. Elections should not be expected before spring 2020, giving the necessary time to PSD to be reorganized and even to take in advantage a possible wear of former ruling party. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries perceiving it as a threat against its national security. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: November 19th, Nebojsa Zelenovic, the Head of the opposition Together for Serbia (Zajedno za Srbiju - ZZS) party, said Serbia “*is on the verge of civil conflict, pushed into by (President Aleksandar) Vucic,*” the Beta news agency reported on Tuesday. Zelenovic also said that “*no one, the regime the least, will benefit*

from a media war in which Vucic has deeply got in,” and demanded from authorities to stop with that before “it escalates into a crisis which no one will be able to control.” “In the last several days, situation has radicalized because Vucic ordered the extreme nationalists, paid journalists and analysts to launch a witch hunt and to threaten all independent journalists publicly, and especially NI reporters, who dare to ask him what he does not like to be asked,” Zelenovic said in a written statement. He added that situation “escalated when Vucic sent his media advisor Suzana Vasiljevic to a TV with national frequency to menace all who think differently and blame NI for President’s health condition.” “The whole of Serbia knows that under Vucic’s order Suzana Vasiljevic edits almost all media and conducts a media hunt against everyone who Vucic declares his enemy, and now draws targets on unfit journalists’ foreheads,” Zelenovic said. He also asked for a replacement of the complete Regularly Body for Electronic Media (REM) team to improve the media situation in the country. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- November 19th, “Negotiating Chapter 4” on free movement of capital, and “Negotiating Chapter 2” on free movement of labor have the greatest chances of being opened in Serbia’s pre-accession negotiations with the EU, announced Radio-Television of Serbia. In addition, “in the decision-making process” are “Negotiating Chapter 21” on Trans-European Networks and “Negotiating Chapter 14” on Transport Policy. RTS also reported that it had access to the latest European Commission report on the state of the rule of law in Serbia. These periodic reports play a key role in deciding whether to open new negotiation chapters. The latest report states, as RTS reports,

that Serbia must accelerate reforms in the area of independence and accountability of the judiciary, freedom of expression, prevention of corruption and the fight against organized crime. The report notes that Serbia has an “inappropriate political influence on the judiciary” which announced reform is “on hold” while “seriously delaying” the coordination of anti-corruption policies, amendments to the Law on Financing Political Activities and the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance. “Cases of threats, intimidation and violence against journalists are worrying,” RTS quoted European Commission report commenting on the chronology of implementing the new media strategy in Serbia, noting political and economic influence on the media and advocating greater independence of the Electronic Regulatory Authority (REM). In the part of the report on “Negotiating Chapter 24,” the European Commission assessed that there were positive steps in border management and migration management in Serbia, in the fight against “cybercrime,” human trafficking, money laundering, and expects that all of this “will bring better effect in the fight against organized crime in general,” RTS reported. (www.b92.net)

- November 22nd, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic announced last night that Russian intelligence officer Georgy Kleban is no longer on the territory of Serbia. He said he was certain that President Vladimir Putin had not been informed of this action, and that Serbia has friendly relations with the Russian Federation. He reiterated that Serbia does not forget what Putin did for Serbia in international organizations, nor his support in equipping Serbian military. He also reminded that Serbia was the only one that did not

impose sanctions on the Russian Federation, did not vote against Russian Federation's interests, it was the only one to maintain military exercises with the Russian Armed Forces and that it did not jeopardize friendship with Russia in any way. "That is why I ask Russian friends, and today I asked Russian Ambassador, Botsan Kharchenko; Why? I did not see any logic in all this," Vucic said. Finally, he reiterated Serbia's firm commitment to military neutrality and he said "Serbia will not join NATO." (www.b92.net)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Spy case engaging a Russian Colonel and a Serb official was a case that shocked Serbian authorities last week. Nevertheless, there are several questions regarding the incident such as the time, who is behind video-tapping, what was the reason of the transaction and the most important; the motives of the action. Serbia and Russia maintain very close relations especially in the field of defense, security (on November 20th, 2019 Russia and Serbia signed two agreements regarding security), economy, and diplomacy. It is not a secret that Serbia is the "long hand" of Russia in Southeastern Europe. It is assessed that bilateral relations of these two countries will not be affected by the incident. Political tension continues in Serbia with opposition persistently refusing dialogue with ruling SNS and hardening its stance against the Government. Opposition ZZS leader Nebojsa Zelenovic claimed that "Serbia is on the edge of a civil conflict" providing rather a dramatic aspect of situation. It is assessed that such statements are in line with opposition's strategy to harden its stance seeking to create conditions of abnormality in the state emphasizing that the current Government is not able to handle situation. Potential boycott of the

elections by opposition will affect Serbia's political stability, economic growth, and its European process. Serbia is seeking to open to new Chapters in the accession negotiation with the EU but latest (informal) report raises serious concerns over Serbia's effectiveness on independence and accountability of the judiciary, freedom of expression, prevention of corruption and the fight against organized crime. Regarding Kosovo, Serbia is waiting to see initiatives and actions of the new Government which will be formed (most likely) with Vetevendosje leader, Albin Kurti as the Prime Minister. Kurti's statements so far (exclusion of Serbian List party from the Government, unification with Albania, full control of Kosovo north by Kosovo institutions) are not encouraging signs and may destabilize the region. A possible deployment and permanent presence of Kosovo security forces in Serb majority north Kosovo would bring tension and turbulence. However, the US and EU are increasing pressure on both sides to restart dialogue. According to information the US mainly seek to forward talks between the two parties before the Serbian elections on spring 2020 but it is very unlikely to see this happens. Serbia insists that taxes should be revoked for joining dialogue. Tension remains between Kosovo and Serbia and none could predict Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation including) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state.



SLOVENIA: November 12th,

Slovenia and Taiwan do not have diplomatic ties, but this does not mean they cannot strengthen cooperation, Vanessa Shih of the Taipei Economic and Culture Office in Austria, told the STA. The 23-million nation provides great business opportunities for Slovenian companies, she believes. Shih expressed regret that she has only limited access to Slovenian authorities. She has had some contact with Slovenian Government representatives but not complete access to Ministries and Government offices and believes that the Chinese Embassy in Ljubljana is the likely reason for this situation. (www.sta.si)

- November 21st, Slovenia's Foreign Minister Miro Cerar endorsed Germany's proposal to form a group of experts to work out proposals to reform NATO, while he called French President Emmanuel Macron's NATO "brain death" comment unproductive. Speaking in Brussels where he attended a ministerial in preparation for the NATO summit in London on December 3rd – 4th, 2019, Cerar said that everyone agreed today that unity, solidarity and joint commitment to common goals were crucial to the Alliance's preserving its role. "We have ascertained that NATO is very much alive," Cerar said. (www.sta.si)

- November 22nd, the National Assembly voted 49/41 last night to pass the budget acts for 2020 and 2021, in what was the first major vote for the minority Government and an important test of the coalition's strength. The populist Slovenian National Party (Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka - SNS) and minority MPs provided both the missing votes. The vote was on the agenda just

weeks after the opposition Left (Levica) party walked away from an agreement that provided the Government with a parliamentary majority, raising the possibility the budget bills would not be passed in time. The group representing local communities in the upper chamber of Parliament said it would decide on Monday whether to propose to the National Council to veto the budgets over what it considers too low funds for municipalities. Prime Minister Marjan Sarec said he did expect a veto. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■:

Marjan Sarec's minority Government received a strong support message last week by the Parliament's approval of the 2020/2021 budget. It was a critical test regarding the Government's stability. It seems that the Left party's withdrawal did not affect the ruling coalition's sustainability. Although the Prime Minister is reassuring for the Government's stability and sustainability there are questions over its effectiveness. The possibility of snap elections is rather unlikely, however it is not certain what will happen when the Government bases its viability on opposition support. Ruling coalition parties and opposition make their political calculations which will signal their further actions. As the prime Minister said a lot of compromise is needed. Opposition SNS (and NSi) offered their parliamentary support in the Government. Slovenia – Croatia relations may be tested in coming period due to the latter's effort to join the Schengen Zone. Slovenia appears determined to play the "Schengen Zone card" in order to push Croatia to implement the ruling arbitration regarding the Piran Bay dispute, but it is not sure if it will insist until the end of the process. It might Slovenia be isolated by the other

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



TURKEY: November 22nd, a so-called “valuation” account at Turkey's Central Bank has fallen by a third over the last month, prompting concerns among some bankers that the bank may transfer some of the funds to Government coffers. The account was worth 47.2 billion lira (7.5 billion euro approximately) as of November 20th, 2019 according to the analytical balance sheet published on the central bank's website, down from 69 billion lira (11 billion euro approximately) a month ago. Reuters News Agency, citing a person with knowledge of the

matter, reported last month that Ankara was working on transferring some 100 billion lira (15 billion euro approximately) from the valuation account to the Treasury. Such a fund transfer would mark Turkey's latest step to lean on the central bank to shore up its budget deficit, which has widened this year. Central bank Governor Murat Uysal said earlier this month such a plan did not exist. The Central Bank told Reuters on Friday there was no change in how it operated the valuation account. The valuation account contains unrealized gains and losses arising from the revaluation of foreign currencies, gold and other assets and liabilities, based on price changes of the lira and gold on international markets. It has proven volatile due to sharp moves in the Turkish lira, which lost as much as half its value in a crisis last year. The account was worth 45 billion lira at the end of 2018, and 55 billion lira at the end of 2017. “We see inexplicable changes in the balance sheet, and we had seen similar changes in the transfer of contingency (legal) reserves. We interpret this as a preparation to transfer [funds] to the Treasury,” said a banker who requested anonymity due to the sensitive issue. “If a similar trend continues through year-end in other budget items, the central bank's profit will rise by 15-22 billion lira” which could be transferred to the Treasury, the banker added. Turkey's Parliament passed a law in July allowing the Central Bank's legal reserves, estimated at 40 billion lira, to be transferred to the Treasury. “If the inexplicable changes in the analytical balance sheet of the Central Bank continue, the profit transfer to the Treasury may reach 60-70 billion lira within a few months, and may be [used] to finance the budget,” a second banker said. (www.aljazeera.com)

- November 22nd, the engagement of international actors in the Eastern Mediterranean and an armament race among regional countries increase the risk of instability in the region, experts at a security conference said Friday. Speaking at the International Security Symposium, organized by the Turkish Police Academy, Professor Mesut Hakkı Casın, the Head of the International Relations Department at İstinye University, said the US, Russia and China have increased their activities in the Eastern Mediterranean by their presence and through regional alliances. He added that they are also provoking rifts to create an arms race. *“The US has established intense cooperation with Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus while Russia has returned to the area with its involvement in the Syrian civil war. We also have China quietly carrying out its activities,”* Casın noted. In June, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee legislation, sponsored by Democrat Bob Menendez, passed the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act, which intends to *“update the US' strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean to meet new challenges and opportunities.”* Regarding the act, Menendez said, *“Israel, Greece and Cyprus are key partners of the US.” “This alliance tries to corner Turkey at its shores. However, Turkey will defend its rights emanating from international laws,”* Casın said. Speaking on the issue, Nursin Atesoglu Guney, an academic from Bahcesehir University, said 44 countries have a naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. She noted that intervention of international actors fuel instability, not only in the region but also in the Middle East. *“The Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) are incapable of bringing stability in the region. Also, no regional countries*

have the competence to lead, which also protracts the uncertainty,” she said. Guney added that the EU's supportive stance toward Greek Cyprus by disregarding the rights of the (so-called) *“Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)”* also does not contribute to the solution of the issue. Cyprus unilaterally declared a total of 13 so-called parcels in the Eastern Mediterranean as its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and allowed international oil and drilling companies to operate in these areas, which are anticipated to hold rich hydrocarbon reserves. Turkey has consistently contested the Greek Cypriot administration's unilateral drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean, asserting that the *“TRNC”* also has rights to the resources in the area. The unilaterally declared EEZ of the Greek Cypriot administration violates part of Turkey's shelf, particularly in Blocks 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7. Stressing that increasing destabilization, legal discord regarding energy areas and immigration are posing significant security threats in the region, Mehmet Sahin, an academic at Turkish Police Academy, said the recent process could be interpreted as the *“Middle Easternization of the Eastern Mediterranean.” “We have more failed states, increasing military presence and new alliances in the region. The region has been engulfed by instability,”* he said. (www.dailysabah.com)

- November 23rd, in October 2019, Turkey launched a military operation in northeast Syria to drive the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) back from its border. Dubbed Operation Peace Spring, Turkey's push was also aimed at establishing a *“safe zone”* stretching at least 30 km into Syria to resettle some of the 3.6 million refugees it currently hosts. In an interview with Al Jazeera, Turkish Minister

of Defense Hulusi Akar discusses the operation in northeast Syria, Turkey's cooperation with Russia and Iran and Ankara's strained relations with the US and NATO following the purchase of the S-400 air defense system from Moscow. The military operation in northeast Syria was condemned by the US, a NATO ally, and members of the international community, but for Ankara it was seen as necessary to ensure national security. The SDF is dominated by the People's Protection Units (YPG), labeled "terrorists" by Ankara because of its ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been fighting the Turkish state for decades. "Our only wish, our only goal, our only effort is towards the security of our country. Who from? The YPG, PKK terrorists and DAESH (ISIL, or ISIS). Our goal is to establish the security of our borders and our people," Akar tells Al Jazeera. "This is not an invasion in any way. This is not an attack in any way. It is only an operation launched against terrorists and terrorism." Akar says if a peace corridor is established, it may enable people to voluntarily and safely return to their homes. "Yes, our President has been reiterating this issue for two or three years now," Akar says, referring to Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "He has been making calls on the US and Europe and he articulated many times that creation of a safe zone is very important, vital for Syrians and that is the most reasonable, rational and humane way." Akar says that with repatriation of Syrians, "it will be possible for them to start a new life, and this, in return, will significantly contribute to peace, stability and the normalization of all conditions, I believe." Responding to criticism that civilians were targeted during the military push, Turkey's third in northern Syria, Akar says "These claims about our operations targeting the

civilians are against all facts. This is an unbelievable issue, because it is not the first time we conduct operations, not the first time we fight against terror." He adds "What we are doing here ... is not arbitrary. We are not acting disrespectfully to any other party's territorial integrity. This is an activity we have been undertaking for the security of our country and to make sure peace is built for the whole region."



Turkish Defense Minister, Hulusi Akar

(Photo source: www.msb.gov.tr)

Asked whether Turkey is still determined to activate the S-400 air defense system, the purchase of which has created a diplomatic crisis with the US and NATO, Akar says Ankara's position has been "very clear" from the onset. "Our President has shared the attitudes, actions and plans by the Republic of Turkey or what we have done or will do, with the rest of the world. By the end of 1990s, we have started to scrutinize on-air missile systems to enable the air and missile defense of our county and nation, and have exerted efforts to have them procured and supplied. Yet due to various reasons, we have had a delay on these activities. In particular, when the

Syrian crisis emerged in 2011, it became a must for us to own air defense missile systems. Following that, we continued with our efforts intensively. However, talks we held with the US and in Europe and the activities for procurement unfortunately could not help make it happen.” Akar adds “Upon experiencing these all, it became apparently clearer that we were in need of a permanent air missile defense system. For this reason, we accelerated our supply-related activities and identified certain criteria. Within the framework of these criteria, we made contacts with Europe, the US and Russia. The right response for these criteria came from the Russians. Therefore, that is how this started. It was a necessity.” He says that the S-400 air defense system will be a “standalone system” that will not be integrated with other NATO systems. (www.aljazeera.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey and Russia implement the agreement on Syrian “safe zone” ensuring a relative truce in the region. Currently, Turkey announced repatriation of 200 Syrian refugees claiming that restoration of peace and stability in the region will strengthen refugees returns. Turkish leadership appears satisfied with the final results of the operation “Peace Spring.” Undoubtedly, Turkey was one of the winners in Syrian conflict. It achieved to establish a 32 kilometers “safe zone” and to force Syrian Kurds to withdraw their forces from an area of 120 kilometers in Turkish – Syrian borders. In other words, Syrian Kurds are no longer a threat to Turkish security since they are not able anymore to conduct and support operations within the Turkish soil. The Turkish plan will be concluded by relocation of almost 2 million Syrian refugees within the “safe

zone” diversifying population’s composition in north Syria. Turkish economy is the big question for the country. It seems that there is difficulty in covering budget’s deficit, while there is public dissatisfaction due to expensive products in Turkish market. Turkey continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. In Eastern Mediterranean Turkey continues to dispute Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by keep violating it repeatedly. Moreover, it raises tension with Greece and Cyprus by announcing several naval exercises with real fires in the Aegean Sea and within Cypriot EEZ. It seems that Turkish strategic plans are targeting the maritime area around the island of Kastelorizo, southeast of the Aegean Sea. Turkey is determined to protect its interests and would not hesitate to use force against Cyprus or Greece. With zero cost so far Turkey achieved not only to consolidate a situation in which Turkish drill ships could enter within Cypriot EEZ whenever they wish accompanied by Turkish navy vessels, but also to put the hydrocarbon issue on the table of


negotiations, to force oil and gas companies to reconsider their engagement in a sea which is not stable and secure, and to directly question the Cypriot sovereignty. So far, so good for a country which exercise a multilateral foreign policy and is engaged in several ongoing armed conflicts. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will set the base to become a regional military super power.


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NOTE

 *Stable situation. No security risk.*

 *Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.*

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

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

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