



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

## ***SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE***

### ***AT A GLANCE***



***SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE***

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

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

### **“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE**

“HERMES” Institute of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy (“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE) is an independent, non – governmental, non – profit organization, consisting of scholars dedicated in the research and analysis of international affairs in regional and global level. The Institute aims at providing objective, scientific, and reliable research analysis through a variety of studies contributing effectively and constructively in the public dialogue and the evolution of scientific knowledge.

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**ALBANIA:** January 23<sup>rd</sup>, On Rama's first day as the country's Foreign Minister, he handed over the institution's leadership to the current Deputy Minister Gent Cakaj. *"This is the shortest speech in my life. In my function as the country's Foreign Minister I delegate to Mr. Gent Cakaj the leadership of this institution and its representation to international organizations,"* Rama said. Cakaj, who has indirectly faced criticism last January after Rama had proposed him as the country's new Foreign Minister, addressed experts' comments after Rama's speech. *"The delegation of competences to a young Deputy Minister like me has seemed a mistake instead of an energy and creativity source to some people,"* Cakaj said. *"The appointment of the Prime Minister as the country's Minister is a special case which is neither foreseen nor forbidden by the Constitution,"* Spokesperson Ted Blushi said. Rama's decision to assume the role of Foreign Minister came as a result of the Albanian President, Ilir Meta's refusal to appoint the 26 year old, Kosovo national Gent Cakaj as the new Foreign Minister after Rama dismissed current Foreign Minister Ditmir Bushati. By not decreeing Bushati's dismissal, Meta took away Rama's option to give Cakaj ministerial competences without receiving Meta's decree. In explaining Meta's decision, Blushi also stated Meta had also taken into consideration the importance of avoiding any constitutional crisis which could place Albania in harmful position in regards to the international arena. Over the last two weeks, a number of local political experts have backed Meta's decision not to decree Cakaj as the country's Chief of diplomacy for a number of reasons. Mainly, it is Cakaj's inexperience, young age and Kosovo nationality that had political experts second-guessing the wisdom of

Rama's choice, in addition to 2019 being a very important year for Albania's foreign agenda, particularly in regards to the challenges of opening accession negotiations with the EU present. (www.tiranatimes.com)



Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs,  
Gent Cakaj

(Photo source: www.punetejashtme.gov.al)

- January 24<sup>th</sup>, The Albanian Government and Shell oil giant have withdrawn from oil search plans at a protected area in the southern Albanian region of Gjirokastra following protests by local residents and reactions of cultural heritage and tourism experts. Representatives of the Albania unit of Shell oil company, already engaged in some major oil exploration projects in the country, announced the company will not carry out any search or drilling activity in Zagoria, a protected area in the region of Gjirokastra with a unique ecosystem and rare animals that has been recently emerged as an adventure travel destination. The Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, also declared that there will be no oil research in Zagoria. *"The debate for the Zagoria National Park is welcome, to remind you that we have declared that park as protected due natural beauties. We cannot allow oil researches there,"*

Rama wrote on social media. The next public hearing will be held in Sheper, where Shell plans to search for oil reserves. Another hearing session failed in Polican as well. (www.tiranatimes.com, www.top-channel.tv)

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, The Albanian Defense Minister Olta Xhacca and visiting NATO Commander of Allied Air Command General Tod D. Wolters discussed the launch of NATO's investment at Kucova Air Base in lower central Albania. Xhacca and General Wolters had an official meeting in Tirana in the light of the Albania's 10th anniversary of NATO membership and NATO's investment at Kucova Air Base. "It is difficult to imagine that nearly 10 years ago, in the spring of 2009 we celebrated Albania's membership in NATO and today we are celebrating the launch of investments at the air base in Kucova," General Wolters stated during the joint press conference. According to Wolters, Kucova's Air Base represents a great opportunity for innovation to improve the control of large space structures. "This is a base that will have the opportunity to host fighter aircrafts that would control air space for military purpose," Wolters said. During her speech, Xhacca emphasized that NATO's investment at Albania's Air Force Base in Kucova is important for both the national and regional security. Xhacca declared that the master-plan for Kucova Air Base will be projected by NATO and will be ready in a few months. General Wolters also had official meetings with the President of Albania Ilir Meta and the Chief of General Staff of the Albanian Armed Forces, Brigadier General, Bardhyl Kollcaku. Last August, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama declared that Albania would have the first NATO air base in the Western Balkans. The Alliance will spend in Kucova air base 50 million

dollars for its renovation and improvement of its capabilities. (www.xinhuanet.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Prime Minister Edi Rama appointed himself as the new Foreign Minister overcoming the President Ilir Meta's refusal to dismiss the Foreign Minister Ditmir Bushati and decree his replacement by Genti Caka. It is not a secret that Meta is a political opponent of the ruling party putting obstacles to the Prime Minister. It is assessed that the Government is stable and its collapse is rather unlikely due to opposition's weakness for such an "achievement". However, opposition urges citizens to join protests against the Government in an effort to push it for early parliamentary elections. 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. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Latest European Parliament assessment on Albania accession negotiations is a rather positive sign underlining concerns over specific issues such as corruption, justice reforms, and implementation of rule of law. The final decision is up to the EU Heads of Governments for opening Albania's accession negotiations in June 2019. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a "mother nation." It is estimated that Albania will fully comply with the EU and U.S "line" for territorial exchanges or border changes between Serbia and Kosovo if it is necessary for a mutual accepted solution. Albania*

*maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and F.Y.R.O.M. In this context, the Albanian Prime Minister and his Government work on promoting Kosovo interests in international community using any forum they have access. Possible border changes may engage Albania in dangerous situations taking into consideration that it has the role of "protector" of Albanians in the region. Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.*



## **BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:**

January 21<sup>st</sup>, Pristina's import tariffs did not only harm the trade in the region but also its stability. Bosnia's Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, Mirko Sarovic told Ministers of the Southeast European countries in charge of trade and agriculture who met in Berlin. *"The customs barriers that Pristina introduced for the goods from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia did not harm only the trade but also the stability of the region because such rash political moves of the Pristina authorities lead to disintegrative processes and overall decline,"* the Minister said. Sarovic met German Minister of Food and Agriculture Julia Kloeckner and European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Vytenis Andriukaitis to discuss the import tariffs that Kosovo authorities introduced for goods from Bosnia and Serbia. These barriers in mutual trade of the countries of the CEFTA customs-free zone (Central European Free Trade Agreement) must be immediately revoked in order not to jeopardize the progress, integration and development that the region achieved, the officials concluded. Free and fair trade, Sarovic said, is essential for the region. *"Lifting the barriers in trade and promoting*

*cooperation and stronger relations in the Western Balkans incites and speeds up economic growth and development of societies in general,"* he said adding that this process has no alternative. Pristina authorities introduced 100% import tariffs for the goods from Bosnia and Serbia in late November last year in response to what Kosovo officials said is Serbia's *"aggressive campaign against Kosovo in the international community."* The decision came a day after Bosnia and Serbia refused to support Kosovo's membership in the Interpol organization but this was never cited as an official reason to introduce the taxes. Sarovic announced last week an expert meeting of Bosnia and Kosovo representatives, which is hoped to result in the abolition of import tariffs. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Bosnia needs to be a modern, liberal and civic state set up according to European standards, the Head of the country's Islamic Community, Husein Effendi Kavazovic, said. He told the 'Patria' news agency in an interview that it is not up to religious communities to get involved in daily politics, but that it is also *"not realistic to expect them to ignore what is going on in society,"* referring to the political turmoil that gripped the country after the October 2018 General Election. *"The Islamic Community wants a progressive Bosnia and Herzegovina in which the dominant color should be blue, the European color,"* Kavazovic said. The political setting in Bosnia is *"splited into three nationalist parties on one side and civic parties on the other,"* he said. *"The first group is afraid a civic Bosnia and Herzegovina would endanger the collective rights of the national groups. The latter, on the other hand, blame nationalist parties for splitting up Bosnia's society, which is known for centuries for its multi-*

*ethnicity.*” Bosnia has faced a lot of dangers, yet has still managed to survive, he said. *“It will last, as most of its citizens see it as their only homeland. I am more concerned about what it will look like, how it will be set up and how attractive it will be for future generations,”* he said. *“We need a modern, liberal and civic state. We need a state set up according to European standards and within it a Bosnian characteristic,”* he concluded. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Party for Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA) will initiate a legal procedure before the Constitutional Court to challenge the name of Bosnia's Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (RS) territory, citing discrimination against Croats and Bosniaks (Muslim Bosnians) living there. *“The previous practice of the RS institutions showed that the entity’s name is intensively and efficiently used to discriminate against the other two constituent peoples - Bosniaks and Croats,”* the SDA said. *“Linking the name to only one people living in the multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina is contrary to the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights.”* Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of two semi-autonomous entities – the Bosniak-Croat shared Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Serb-dominated RS. The issue with the name stems from the fact that it means the *“Serb Republic”* when translated. However, the Dayton Peace Agreement, which ended the war in Bosnia (1992-1995) and which contains the State Constitution, stipulates in its original form, written in English, that the entity is *“Republika Srpska,”* indicating that the name could not be translated as the *“Serb Republic.”* That was an attempt to prevent discrimination against Bosniaks and Croats living in that entity. However, the RS media and institutions continued

to use the short version of the name *“Srpska”* (Serb’) which some non-Serb officials said is offensive against the non-Serbs living in the entity. The strongest Bosniak nationalist party, the SDA further said that the Constitutional Court made an earlier decision on the constituency of the people which stipulated that entities must ensure full equality of all constituent peoples in their legal systems. In one of the first reactions to the SDA’s announcement, the RS National Assembly (RSNA) Speaker Nedeljko Cubrilovic said this is nothing but a provocation and that it represents an anti-Constitutional act. The names of the FBiH and RS were made in 1995 in Dayton, and the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement marked the agreement of all parties to Bosnia’s internal structure and the name of Republika Srpska which are thus verified by the State Constitution, Cubrilovic added. *“Initiating a Constitutional Court discussion on the name of the RS would mark the end of the project called Bosnia and Herzegovina,”* Cubrilovic noted. Reacting to calls for the Constitutional Court to review the legality of RS’s name Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik called on the second largest Serb party to agree for the entity to secede from Bosnia. When the initiative enters the Court, the RSNA will *“at the same moment”* hold a session, Dodik said. *“Our authentic and original constitutional right is for us to decide on our status. We will do that,”* he said, dismissing earlier statements by the High Representative Valentin Inzko, named by the international community to oversee the civilian implementation of the Dayton Agreement, who said that the RS cannot secede. Only a day earlier, SDA and Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrataor - SNSD) top officials met in Sarajevo to discuss the implementation of the results of the October 2018

General Election and the forming of the Council of Ministers. After the meeting, Deputy leader of the SDA, Adil Osmanovic, told media that participants of the meeting agreed to lower tensions between the parties. (www.ba.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*A major crisis is imminent due to Bosniak nationalistic party SDA intention to challenge Republica Srpska's name before the state's Constitutional Court. Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik stated that if such an initiative enters the Court, RS will secede. It is not clear yet why SDA decided to emerge such an issue in a very sensitive period for Bosnia's stability. Although it is assessed that SDA will back down for such a move, Bosnia faces a direct threat of dissolution. Moreover, such initiatives undermine state's sustainability and stability. It is a question if this radical initiative will affect talks on Government's formation. Needless to remind that Bosnia has not a Government since October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018 general elections. Although the three main parties representing the three constituent entities (Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats); HDZ (Bosnian Croatian party), SDA (Bosnian Muslim or Bosniak party), and SNSD (Bosnian Serbian party) express their will to cooperate in forming a Government they cannot reach an agreement due to their different views on main issues. Bosnia's accession process towards NATO is the main disputable issue; Bosnian Serbs insist that the country should remain neutral staying out of NATO while the two other members of the tripartite Presidency set commitment to NATO accession as a precondition for supporting a Government. Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political*

*fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs destabilizing the state. It is more than impressive that Bosnian Serbs and Croats came very close aiming at achieving their special goals. Of course, both entities take in advantage "Dayton Peace Agreement" weaknesses and malfunctions. Russia pays special attention in Serbia and Bosnia in order to maintain its influence in the region. Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, and Montenegro have already entered NATO, while F.Y.R.O.M would join the Alliance on June 2019. These two countries (Serbia and Bosnia) are the only "vehicles" for Russia to maintain a narrow influence in Southeastern Europe. Election of ultra nationalist pro-Russian Serb Milorad Dodik in the tripartite Presidency is a strong sign of more nationalistic rhetoric and more obstacles towards Bosnia's EU and NATO integration. Dodik is a person who does not actually believe in B&H viability and is expected to promote (actually, he has already started) his own political agenda. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their interests.*



**BULGARIA:** January 21<sup>st</sup>, the Bulgarian Air Force announced in its annual report that the main tasks set in its Action Plan for 2018, have been successfully accomplished and its personnel is capable of performing missions and operations. During the analysis, emphasis was put on the necessary training, military personnel and flight safety. Commander of the Bulgarian Air Force Major General Tsanko Stoykov said in his report that the service focused its efforts on the preparation for building the necessary



capabilities for planning and participating in operations including joint ones. In addition, the Bulgarian Air Force has actively participated in the implementation of the third mission of the Armed Forces *“Contribution to the national security in peacetime”* by guarantying Bulgarian air sovereignty and providing continuous and effective protection of the Bulgarian airspace. Report emphasized that in 2018 the most challenging task was the efforts in keeping the trained staff and the young specialists motivated since they are a key factor in the successful accomplishment of the Air Force goals. Action has been taken at all levels to minimize the main risk factors related to flight safety. *“Realization of modernization projects that are focused on the acquisition of a new combat aircraft, is fundamental to the successful development of the Air Force’s capabilities as well as to achieving interoperability with our allies,”* Stoykov said.



Commander of the Bulgarian Air Force Major General Tsanko Stoykov presented the 2018 annual report

(Photo source: [www.af.armf.bg](http://www.af.armf.bg))

Speaking about 2019 challenges Stoykov said the Air Force will focus primarily on the following areas; maintenance and improvement of the flight training level regarding fulfilling core aviation tasks, conduct training courses for young flight crews, delivery of new equipment, participation in national and international exercises with emphasis

on “Shabla 2019”, and actions and measures regarding flight safety. The Air Force’s annual report was carried out by the contribution of the Chief of Defense General Andrey Botsev, the Commander of the Joint Force Command Lieutenant General Lyubcho Todorov, as well as, Chiefs of Departments and Sectors in the Command and Staff of the Air Force and the Commands of the subordinate military formations. ([www.bulgarianmilitary.com](http://www.bulgarianmilitary.com), [www.af.armf.bg](http://www.af.armf.bg))

- January 23<sup>rd</sup>, Bulgaria is ready to start negotiations with the United Kingdom (UK) on the signature of a bilateral social agreement if the UK leaves the EU without a deal, the Bulgarian National Radio wrote. The purpose of this agreement is to protect the rights of the Bulgarians who live and work in the United Kingdom, Bulgaria’s Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Policy Zornitsa Rusinova told the Bulgarian National Radio. Rusinova underlined that Bulgaria will insist on reciprocity and clear residence rules. We are planning meetings in London and other big cities in the UK with large Bulgarian communities, so the Bulgarian citizens are well-informed, Rusinova pointed out. ([www.novinite.com](http://www.novinite.com))

- January 23<sup>rd</sup>, Valeri Simeonov’s National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (Natzionalen Front za Spasenie na Bulgaria - NFSB) has suspended negotiations with Krassimir Karakachanov’s Bulgarian National Movement (Bulgarsko Natsionalno Dvizhenie - VMRO) on standing jointly in Bulgaria’s May 2019 European Parliament elections. This is the latest breakdown within the United Patriots coalition, the grouping of three far-right and ultra-nationalist parties that is the minority partner in Prime Minister Boiko

Borisssov's Government. The leader of the third party, Ataka's (Attack) Volen Siderov, earlier declined to take part in the talks on standing together in the European Parliament elections. In a media statement, the NFSB complained that it had been the subject of media attacks by the VMRO which Simeonov's party said that had been "wrapped up in fake concern for the future of the (United Patriots) coalition." Simeonov's party said that these attacks had been over issues included the selection of a new fighter jet for the Bulgarian Air Force, the question of the acquisition of Bulgarian citizenship and the issue of Bulgaria's Roma minority. The NFSB statement asked if these attacks were not successive steps in the direction of the VMRO standing alone in the election or standing with another party "and if so, would it not be more proper and normal for there to be disclosure, so that there is no drama about it." Simeonov said that it did not matter for his party who would head the candidates list for the European Parliament elections. There have been statements and reports in recent months that Siderov wants to head the list of candidates for the European Parliament, though in recent days he has denied this. The more reliable recent opinion polls in Bulgaria suggest that should the United Patriots not stand together in the May European Parliament elections, the individual parties would have scant chance of winning any seats in the EU's legislature. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*The junior partner of the ruling coalition, United Patriots looks like the vulnerable piece of the Governmental stability; none could predict when a new incident or dispute will break out. Thus, Bulgaria has entered in a period of fragile*

*political stability. The President Radev grabs every opportunity to criticize the Government (and the Prime Minister Borisssov) highlighting his different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Opposition BSP tries to push further Borisov and his Government by strengthening its rhetoric and having tabled three motions of no confidence so far. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. However, the EC made clear that Bulgaria could not enter the Eurozone before 2022. Apart from that the European Parliament adopted a resolution for the accession of Bulgaria (and Romania) in Schengen Zone. However, it is questioned if the European Council will receive a unanimous final decision for Bulgaria under the current migration pressure. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Although modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc) military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards. Security situation stable; no major threats.*



**CROATIA:** January 21<sup>st</sup>, the Constitutional Court has rejected a complaint filed by the "People Decide" and "Truth About Istanbul" civil initiatives. The two initiatives were looking for the process of signature verification to be declared null. The Court's decision was adopted by a majority, with a dissenting opinion from Judge Miroslav Sumanovic. The two initiatives filed their complaint after their two referendum bids were rejected by the Government in a long and drawn-out process that at times

deviated from previous standard practice when it comes to establishing whether or not a referendum will proceed or not. One of the key factors, was that both initiatives submitted what they believed to be well more than the required number of signatures to force their respective referendums, only to have the process then drawn out for nearly six months and the process of counting and verifying signatures handed to a private company, and not the state electoral commission. When the count was finally completed one in ten signatures from both petition drives were found to be invalid, including 30 thousand for not being “legible.” Both initiatives, have expressed dissatisfaction with the Court's ruling. The “People Decide” civil initiative was calling for a referendum on how MP's are elected to Parliament, pushing for sweeping changes to the electoral system that would contribute to direct democracy and eliminate political bartering. While the “Truth About Istanbul” civil initiative was calling for the rescinding of the Istanbul Convention. Administration Minister Lovro Kuscevic, clearly pleased with the Court's decision, announced that his Ministry will now begin drafting a new law on referendums. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, Croatia's Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Oleg Butkovic, met with Chinese Transport Minister Li Xiaopeng in Beijing for talks on investments in infrastructure projects in Croatia, Chinese companies' interest for using the northern Adriatic port of Rijeka, and on possible launch of direct flights between Zagreb and Beijing. Butkovic cited the Peljesac Bridge project as the most significant Croatian - Chinese venture to date, and talked about Croatia's favorable geographic position, which should make the country attractive to Chinese

companies wishing to access the European markets. Li said that China is encouraging its companies to apply for tenders in Croatia and to comply with all the required deadlines and local regulations. He added that the two countries were fostering friendly relations, and that Croatia is an important partner to China. “*Cooperation in the area of infrastructure is only in its initial stage, and will be further strengthened through the Belt and Road and China+16 initiatives,*” Li said. The Croatian delegation included representatives of the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, and executives from state-owned HZ Infrastruktura Railway Company, the Hrvatske Ceste Road Management Company, and the Rijeka Port Operator. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic attended a panel on the Western Balkans as part of the World Economic Forum in Davos. The panel discussed a variety of topics, including regional stability, boosting trade and competitiveness, and joining the so-called “*fourth industrial revolution.*” The panel, held behind closed doors, also included F.Y.R.O.M's Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev, Bosnia and Herzegovina's Prime Minister, Denis Zvizdic, and Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic. Talking to N1 after the meeting, Plenkovic said that he had pointed out three key points in his remarks. “*Present-day leaders must have a good understanding of what went on in the area east of Croatia in the 1990s in order to understand today's relations. Second, joint efforts of state institutions must complement each other in terms of building infrastructure and modernization required for the fourth industrial revolution. Third, Croatia will host the EU and Southeast Europe summit on May 2019, during the time of Croatia's EU Chairmanship,*” Plenkovic said. He was also asked to comment

on recent statements by Bosnian Serb leader, Milorad Dodik, about the prospects of the Serb-dominated half of Bosnia and Herzegovina seceding. *“Croatia's stance is that peace and stability in our neighborhood are paramount. We do not approve of anything that might cause instability, and we want to see a high degree of responsibility of all the partners involved. We have heard similar statements before... It is Croatia's policy to respect the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina,”* Plenkovic told N1. (www.hr.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Croatia follows a tough regional policy with neighboring countries. It is openly intervene in Bosnia's internal affairs, while it maintains open disputes with Slovenia, Serbia, and Bosnia. It is assessed that Croatia's strategic goal is to amend “Dayton Peace Agreement” achieving to recognize Bosnian Croats as a third entity in the country. It is more than obvious that Croatia tries to establish a leading role in Western Balkans not only as an EU and NATO member state but also as a rising “local” (Western Balkans) power. One should take into consideration that Croatia shows its military strength and capabilities quite often not only in international, but also in national level sending strong messages to neighboring countries. Although the President is a member of the ruling party, it is estimated that there is some kind of political distance between the President and Government. However, ruling coalition claims political stability. Border dispute on Piran Bay remains active and Slovenia's initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. It is still a question how Croatia will react. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in*

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



**CYPRUS:** January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Cyprus has reported violations of its air space and marine areas which occurred in November 2018. Violations were reported to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in writing on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 by Cyprus' Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Poly Ioannou. According to a press release, the letter was circulated on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019 as an official document of the General Assembly and Security Council. Attached are two documents describing in detail the violations, as well as the illegal use by Turkey of closed ports and airports in the Turkish occupied area. Ioannou said the continuing violations of international law constituted a threat to peace, regional stability, and the safety of international civil aviation, and hinder the creation of a favorable environment for the peace process in Cyprus. She also called on Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots to take into consideration the calls of the international community and contribute towards resuming the peace process, instead of undermining the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus and deepening the de facto division and “upgrading the secessionist entity” in the north. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 26<sup>th</sup>, in a written response, Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci said that in his meeting on Friday with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu it was reiterated that President Nicos Anastasiades had referred to a two-state

solution on multiple occasions. Akinci also wished to remind the public that during Friday's press conference with Cavusoglu both referred to their willingness to work towards a solution and their opposition to the continuation of the status quo. This can be achieved through negotiations within the UN framework, he said. Akinci added that Cavusoglu agreed on the necessity of political equality, and that a basic prerequisite for the resumption of talks is that they are not open-ended. Throughout the years, Anastasiades has referred to various models for a solution, including a two-state solution, a confederation, a loose federation and a decentralized federation, the Turkish Cypriot leader said. Though Anastasiades has claimed that he was not exactly referring to a two-state solution or to a loose federation, Akinci added, it is not possible that at the same time he is attempting to mislead everyone's memory. Akinci called on Anastasiades to clearly state what his wishes are for the Greek Cypriot community and to do away with the confusion that he has caused. If there are new ideas, these must be tabled and discussed, he added. His comments came hours after Government Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said those made by Akinci and Cavusoglu made no sense ahead of the visit of UN envoy Jane Holl Lute to the island to facilitate an agreement on the terms of reference for restarting Cyprus talks. Prodromou reiterated an appeal by Anastasiades, who on Friday called on the Turkish side to clearly state its position with regard to a Cyprus solution. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 26<sup>th</sup>, Cyprus does not pursue a policy of confrontation and limits itself to the exercise of its sovereign rights in its own Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), President Nicos Anastasiadis told the Greek daily Ta Nea in an interview. *"I want to*

*highlight that we do not follow the rhetorical confrontation that Turkey is pushing for,"* Anastasiades said, responding to whether he is concerned about a heated development in view Ankara's behavior over hydrocarbons. Anastasiades added that he considers particularly important the upcoming Southern EU countries (MED7) Summit which will convene on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in Nicosia, the agenda of which includes Europe's energy security. On Friday Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Turkey would begin drilling for resources around Cyprus. Turkey will start drilling around Cyprus because the Greek Cypriot Government did not listen to Ankara's suggestions to ensure the rights of Turkish Cypriots, Cavusoglu said during an interview following a meeting with Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci. *"Our second platform is coming in February. We were going to send it to the Black Sea, now we are sending it to the Cyprus area,"* Cavusoglu said. *"Our drill ship Fatih is currently in the Alanya-1 area, its work there will be done in March. We are shifting that to the south too,"* he added. The MED7 Summit, Anastasiades said, will hopefully reignite interest in Mediterranean Europe and its *"frontier role."* *"The meeting is also of particular importance for Cyprus, which is at Europe's border with the Middle East, in an area where major European issues such as security and immigration play out,"* Anastasiades said. In response to a question about the possibility of NATO guarantees in Cyprus, Anastasiades stressed that there can be no solution to the Cyprus problem with Turkey as a guarantor power and with rights of intervention. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

*Cyprus works systematically in order to become a major part of the East Mediterranean energy hub. Its natural gas deposits affect not only its economy but also its security. The strategy of multilateral cooperation seems to be fruitful. At the moment, Cyprus is engaged in three different trilateral formations which also include strong features of strategic cooperation and alliance; Cyprus – Egypt – Greece, Cyprus – Israel – Greece, and Cyprus – Jordan – Greece. The last two are highly improved due to the US engagement which expressed their interest by joining the latest summit. Drilling activities on behalf of ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum in Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone are close to the end and the announcement of results will determine further steps. Turkish threats and aggression did not stop the Cypriot energy project so far. It is a fact that Cyprus has a significant deficit of military power which is (externally) balanced by regional cooperation. However, the US administration appears ready to abolish the arms embargo against Cyprus allowing it to improve its military capabilities. Involvement of an American company (ExxonMobil) in the drills it is proved “wise” and “smart.” Announcement of Turkish seismographic research within the Cypriot EEZ could be assessed as spasmodic actions of Turkey against Cyprus (already predicted and expected). At the moment, none could assess the level of escalation Turkey seeks to reach. Taking into consideration that Cyprus lacks of military power and especially aeronautical forces it is expected Greece to be engaged more actively in the region. Conduct of aeronautical exercises in cooperation with other countries (Israel, Egypt etc) sends various messages of defense capability, readiness, and determination. Although the UN Secretary General appears optimistic for a new round of*

*talks between the two communities, it is assessed that talks could not be resumed earlier than summer 2019. President Anastasiades promotes the scenario of a “bizonal, bicomunal decentralized federation”; an idea which is in principle accepted by the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community and enjoys support from the U.S. However, there are a lot of disputed issues in which both parts should compromise; the most important is considered the decision-making process. Recent close approach between Cyprus and the US provoked Russia’s strong reaction which foresees a possible isolation from its influence in the Island. It is not a secret that Russia enjoys or used to enjoy a privileged relationship with Cyprus due to the US distance regarding defense and foreign policy neutrality. It is a question how Cyprus will achieve to balance between the US and Russia interests in the region. 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.*



**F.Y.R.O.M:** January 21<sup>st</sup>, the Head of NATO’s Intelligence and Security Division, Ambassador Arndt Freytag von Loringhoven, paid a three days visit in Skopje focused on reforming the country’s defense and security institutions. While in Skopje, Mr von Loringhoven held meetings with half a dozen senior Government officials, including Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and President Gjorge Ivanov. On his first visit to the country as NATO’s Intelligence Chief, von Loringhoven welcomed the Parliament’s final vote on the Prespa Agreement and pledged the Alliance’s full support for the country’s accession to NATO.



*“The Prespa Agreement is an important contribution to a stable and prosperous region,”* he said, adding *“you can count on NATO’s support through the accession process and we look forward to welcoming you as NATO’s 30<sup>th</sup> member.”* He further expressed confidence in Skopje’s continued commitment to defense and security reforms, calling them *“an essential part of the process of accession, which will allow us to work together effectively.”* NATO welcomes recent important progress on transparency, judicial reforms, and civilian oversight of the intelligence and security agencies in Skopje. Von Loringhoven is NATO’s first Assistant Secretary General for Intelligence and Security. He took up his post in December 2016, and is responsible for providing intelligence support to the North Atlantic Council, as well as advising the NATO Secretary General on intelligence matters. Prior to his appointment, he served as the German Ambassador to the Czech Republic, and previously served as Vice President of the German Intelligence Service. ([www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int))

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, as the ruling Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Социјалдемократски сојуз на Македонија - SDSM) party is expected to discuss calling for early general elections in April/May 2019, Deputy Prime Minister Bujar Osmani from its coalition partner Democratic Union for Integration (Демократска унија за интеграција - DUI) said that they will respect SDSM’s decision. *“Our priority is to complete the process to begin EU accession talks. Early general elections would complicate that process. In principle we are against elections, but if SDSM decides in favor, we will not be against. But, we send a message to all political parties that now is the time to focus on the reform agenda and begin accession talks this year,”* Osmani said. DUI lost

much of its group in Parliament due to Albanian tactical voting in favor of SDSM in 2016, which made SDSM the second largest, or even largest Albanian party in F.Y.R.O.M, and Osmani said that DUI would benefit from early elections. As SDSM continues to lose ethnic [Slav] Macedonian voters, the two ruling parties are enhancing their competition for the Albanian vote. Meanwhile, the two parties are discussing having a joint presidential candidate. Osmani said that DUI will insist on this, as he said, *“consensual candidate,”* regardless whether early general elections are also called. ([www.republika.mk](http://www.republika.mk))

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, *“Congratulations my friend Alexis Tsipras, together with our peoples we reached a historic victory,”* Prime Minister Zoran Zaev wrote on social media, regarding the ratification of the Prespa Agreement at the Greek Parliament. *“Long live the Prespa Agreement! For eternal peace and progress of the Balkans and in Europe!”* wrote Zaev in his address. With 153 MPs in favor, today the Greek parliament ratified the Prespa Agreement that was signed by F.Y.R.O.M and Greece to put an end to the name dispute that lasted for almost three decades. ([www.mia.mk](http://www.mia.mk))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Greek Parliament ratified the name deal between F.Y.R.O.M and Greece concluding successfully a “painful” process and opening the accession road towards NATO and EU. The country moves steadily towards Euro-Atlantic integration and becomes a factor of stability and regional cooperation in Western Balkans. Taking into consideration that F.Y.R.O.M has signed a good neighboring agreement with Bulgaria it achieved*

*to resolve all its disputes with its neighbors. It should also emphasize that the EU has set as a precondition of accession the resolution of regional disputes between Western Balkan countries. The Prime Minister Zoran Zaev enjoys “the fruits of his effort” being the absolute dominant in state’s politics. It is expedient early parliamentary elections to be called on April or May 2019. The historic fact is that Zaev resolved a 27 year long dispute unlocking the doors of the EU and NATO and strengthening stability and security of the state. One should also note that F.Y.R.O.M’s Albanian community is satisfied with latest developments strengthening state’s cohesion. The U.S and EU enjoy their success also since F.Y.R.O.M moves in their paths far from Russia’s influence. Needless to say that in a period where border questions are raised again in the Balkans F.Y.R.O.M achieved to strengthen its political stability and growth prospects.*



**GREECE:** January 25<sup>th</sup>, Turkish fighter jets violated Greek airspace on Friday morning, flying over three islets in the southeastern Aegean. According to an announcement from the National Defense General Staff, a pair of Turkish F-16s flew over the islets of Megisti (Kastelorizo) and Ro at an altitude of 26,000 feet. They returned just a few minutes later to fly over Strongyli islet at 22,000 feet. ([www.ekathimerini.com](http://www.ekathimerini.com))

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, following a tumultuous session in Parliament, Greek MPs approved the Prespes deal which will rename F.Y.R.O.M into “*North Macedonia*,” ending a decades-long dispute between the two countries. The contentious deal passed into law – with 153 votes in favor, 146 against and one present – following several days of vehement debate in the Parliament and protests

in the streets. The next step will be the ratification of the so-called accession protocol for F.Y.R.O.M to be able to join NATO under the new name, largely a formality as the deal ratified in the Parliament obliges Greece not to block potential accession bids by its neighbor. The Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras welcomed the deal’s ratification as “*historic*,” and referred to the Balkan country as North Macedonia. “*It will be a friend and an ally of Greece in its efforts for security, stability and mutual development in the region*,” Tsipras said for Greece’s Balkan neighbor. Speaking later on Friday, at an Economist conference in Athens, conservative New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis reiterated his view that the deal will create more problems for Greece than it solves. The win, which came on the anniversary of leftist Coalition of Radical Left’s (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) rise to power four years ago, had been widely anticipated as most MPs had made their voting intentions known several days earlier. In addition to SYRIZA’s 145 MPs, Tsipras garnered the support of independents Elena Kountoura, Katerina Papacosta, both Ministers, and Thanasis Papachristopoulos of former junior coalition partner Independent Greeks (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες – ANEL), centrist To Potami MPs Stavros Theodorakis, Spyros Lykoudis and Giorgos Mavrotas, as well as Spyros Danellis, a former To Potami MP who is now independent, and Thanasis Theocharopoulos, formerly with the centrist Movement for Change (Κίνημα Αλλαγής – KINAL). The approval of the Prespes deal in Parliament prompted congratulations from European, U.S, and NATO officials who had pressed for a resolution to the long-standing row. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called the vote “*an important contribution to the*



*stability and prosperity of the whole region,”* while the U.S Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hailed a *“historic opportunity to advance stability, security, and prosperity throughout the region”* and congratulated political leaders for showing *“vision, courage, and persistence in their pursuit of a solution to the name dispute.”* European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said the vote had *“written a new page of our common EU future,”* while United Nations envoy Matthew Nimetz, a veteran mediator in the dispute, spoke of a *“visionary step,”* adding that the vote *“ushers in a new era for the consolidation of peace and security in the Balkans.”* (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, Greece's Council for Foreign Affairs and Defense (KYSEA) appointed Lieutenant General (Air Marshal) Christos Christodoulou as the new Chief of the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (HNDGS), after Admiral Evangelos Apostolakis left the post to become Defense Minister. Lieutenant General Georgios Kampas was appointed Chief of the Hellenic Army General Staff (HAGS), Vice Admiral Nicolaos Tsounis remained Chief of the Hellenic Navy General Staff and Lieutenant General Georgios Blioumis is the new Chief of the Hellenic Air Force. The meeting was chaired by the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. (www.ekathimerini.gr)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Greek Parliament ratified the “Prespes agreement” (as it was expected) signed between Greece and F.Y.R.O.M resolving a 27 year long dispute regarding the latter’s name. The issue provoked “chain reactions” in Greece. The Government survived from a confidence vote “politically destroying the minor parliamentary*

*parties including its former partner Independent Greeks. Successful conclusion of the ratification process regarding the name deal open the gates for early parliamentary elections in May 2019. The Government will focus next 3-4 months on relieving society by taking economic and social care measures. Greek society looks divided due to “Prespes Agreement” and it is a fact that the deal was against majority of citizens will. There is much anger among people and attacks against MPs who voted in favor of the agreement. A long pre-electoral period may polarize society with unpredictable results. Political turmoil emerged in a period where Greece faces several diplomatic, security, and economic challenges. The alternative scenario of parliamentary election in autumn 2019 when actually mandate of current Government expires has few possibilities under the current political situation. Internal terrorism is considered as a major unresolved problem of national security undermining stability of the state. Tension between Greece and Turkey has been raised not only in rhetoric level. Turkish fighter jets keep violating Greek airspace, while NAVTEXs reserves part of Greek continental shelf and Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone. It is assessed that Greece is taking measures to deter any further escalation by the Turkish side showing determination and readiness to protect national interests. Next period will be critical to see if Turkey keeps maintaining a war of words or it will escalate situation taking in advantage an accidental or preplanned incident.*



**KOSOVO:** January 22<sup>nd</sup>, in social media post President Hashim Thaci announced that based on his Constitutional responsibilities he has decreed with a new five year mandate Lieutenant General Rrahman Rama, as the

Commander-in-Chief of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF). Last year the Parliament of Kosovo approved a package of laws extending the mandate of the lightly armed force of KSF into full fledged Army. Thaci said that Rama has outstanding contribution in KSF functionality and the new mandate will strengthen further consolidation of the service. *“I am convinced that Lieutenant General Rama will carry out all his duties with passion, honor and dignity. He had an outstanding contribution in transition of the KSF and the new mandate will only help further consolidation of our force,”* Thaci said. (www.gazetaexpress.com)



KSF Commander Lieutenant General Rrahman Rama

(Photo source: www.mksf-ks.org)

- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Kosovo's President Hashim Thaci has supported the initiative of South Mitrovica's Mayor, Agim Bahtiri, on unification of this town divided into ethnic lines between Albanians living in the South and Serbs in the North. Thaci met Bahtiri who recently has launched a petition on unification of this town with the northern part dominated by Serbs. *“Unification of Mitrovica*

*town is irreversible. During the meeting with mayor Bahtiri we have concluded that citizens of Mitrovica have already gave their opinion. Now is up to the Government, Parliament and President's Office to act,”* Thaci wrote on social media. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 24<sup>th</sup>, Kosovo's state delegation in dialogue with Serbia is set to meet on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in Brussels with the EU Foreign Policy Chief, Federica Mogherini. Co-heads of the dialogue team Fatmir Limaj and Shpend Ahmeti, will meet t Mogherini, who is facilitating Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue. The news has been confirmed by Kosovo's Deputy Prime Minister, Enver Hoxhaj. The Kosovo's state delegation met Mogherini for the first time two weeks ago when they discussed on dialogue with Serbia and on tax Kosovo's Government has imposed for all goods from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Following the meeting, Mogherini stated that reaching an agreement on normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia is essential. Ahmeti said that Pristina - Belgrade dialogue is expected to be intensive in the first part of 2019 as part of efforts to reach a final legally - binding agreement between the two countries. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

*Kosovo has reached a critical point where only through normalization of relations with Serbia it will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. However, the state's authorities show a tendency of escalating tension with Serbia undermining a peaceful resolution of the case. By imposing 100% tariff on Serbian (and Bosnian products), establishing Kosovo army, executing*

*Special Forces operation in northern Kosovo, arresting Serbs, and requesting special court for Serbs it is created a climate which does not facilitate dialogue and the establishment of confidence between the two parties. International community namely the U.S and EU push the Government to remove 100% tariff, but Haradinaj resists. It should be also underlined that at the moment Kosovo's political power are divided (or looks like being divided) regarding negotiation process and goals. The Prime Minister Haradinaj and the Government are not in harmony with the President Thaci who is the chief negotiator of the state. There is even a matter of legitimacy within the state regarding who is authorized to represent the country in dialogue with Serbia. Kosovo Government works on establishing a legal framework regarding dialogue with Serbia. The EU and the Foreign Policy High Representative rejected Haradinaj's unilateral actions accusing him of undermining dialogue. The question of border exchange or simply change continues to divide Kosovo political forces and population. However, it could be estimated that if Kosovo keeps on acting in such way it may be isolated on the table of international negotiations. It seems that the U.S (and the EU) has a leading role in the background pushing for the idea of territorial change (or exchange). Thaci reiterated once again his confidence that dialogue will start again and agreement will be reached. It is assessed that there is somekind background talks between Thaci and Vucic which strengthen Kosovo President's confidence that his country will be recognized by Serbia. It is a fact that Thaci, and the EU wish to isolate Haradinaj intervention in the dialogue process. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO*

*will be long and hard. Establishment of Kosovo Army is also a factor of destabilization since there is always a possibility of Police or military engagement with Serbian forces. One should take into consideration that the Serb President has already ordered all defense and security stakeholders to take all necessary measures for protecting Serbian population in Kosovo.*



**MOLDOVA:** January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Dmitry Peskov, the Spokesman of the President Vladimir Putin, confirmed that a meeting of the Russian leader with Moldovan President Igor Dodon is scheduled for next week. “Indeed, preparations are being made for a meeting with President Dodon next week. You know that permanent communication is taking place and many issues, including commercial and economic cooperation, are on the agenda of the talks,” Peskov said. Igor Dodon announced yesterday that he will not participate in the parliamentary elections on the Socialist Party's list. He said that if he had been involved in the election campaign he would not have been able to meet with foreign officials, announcing that he would soon pay a visit to the Russian Federation, where he will have talks with Putin. Although the Transnistrian issue is not on the agenda, the Head of state said that one of the topics to be addressed is the export of Moldovan products to the Russian market. ([www.moldova.org](http://www.moldova.org))

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, the electoral campaign for the parliamentary elections of February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 has launched. Candidates have 30 days to convince people to cast their vote. However, there are several restrictions during this period that electoral competitors have to take into account. The campaign will end the day before the vote namely on Saturday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019. On the

national constituency were registered nine parties, the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM), the electoral bloc “ACUM”, Communist Party of Moldova (Partidul Comunist al Moldovei – PCM), Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova – PSRM), the Republican Socio-Political Movement Equality (Mișcare Social-Politică Republicană Ravnopravie - SOR), the Popular Anti-Mafia Movement, Our Party, the Party of the People’s Will and the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL). (www.moldova.org)

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, Moldova’s delegation elucidated more serious infringements committed by the so-called Transnistrian power-wielding structures in the Bender city – a settlement with enhanced security regime, at a meeting of the Joint Control Commission (JCC) on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The detailed notified cases, with the annexed confirmative materials, were set forth in an appeal distributed to all JCC members. The abuses found out refer to the placement of mobile posts of “border guards” and “customs checkpoints” at the intersection of streets separating the Bender city from the Varnita village, as well as at the railway station Bender-2. Each time, when the military representative on behalf of Moldova and the Joint Military Command of the Peacekeeping Forces demand the moving of military observers of all sides on the spot for fixing the infringement in the way established, Tiraspol’s representatives deliberately drag this process, giving possibility to the Transnistrian power-wielding structures to withdraw their “posts” ahead of being subjected to documentation by all components of the peacekeeping format. Thus, the abuses, although ascertained by the Moldovan side, have remained

non-included in the weekly report of the Joint Military Command. For this reason, Moldova’s delegation, by adopting a categorical position, refused the approval of the report on the situation in the Security Zone, regarding it as incomplete. As for the aforementioned incidents, the representative of the Transnistrian power-wielding structures, in an arrogant way, did not deny the existence of such mobile posts and did not rule out other similar situations in the long run. The cases described represent one more proof of the inefficiency of the present procedures of monitoring of the Security Zone, with their improvement necessary. Yet, the proposals and requirements formulated by the Moldovan side were not backed by the leaders of the delegations of the Transnistrian region and Russia. During the same meeting, representatives of the OSCE Mission in Moldova and of Ukraine, delegated to JCC, reported on the developments recorded in the activity of the working groups. At the same time, in connection with the parliamentary polls already established for February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 Moldova’s delegation submitted a petition for ensuring law and order in the settlements from the Security Zone, both in the electoral campaign and on the election day. The Commission members also signed a public appeal to the residents of the Security Zone with a message to voluntarily deliver the illegally owned arms and ammunitions to the law-enforcement bodies. (www.moldpres.md)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Political life is “hostage” of the pro-Russian President Igor Dodon and pro-Western Government rivalry which undermines the institutional function of the country. In the wider framework Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic*

*structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. Political situation in the country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which will strengthen state's transparency, accountability and democratic values. Coming parliamentary elections scheduled for February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 will be closely monitored by the international community and especially the US and EU as a "democratic stress test." Romanian Presidency of the EU Council is a positive conjuncture for Moldova changing the climate between Moldova and EU. Moreover the US express concerns over a possible Russian interference in the elections. The Government is sliding into dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime and deep and determined justice reforms are needed. The U.S, EU and IMF express their major concerns. Opposition parties try to establish a single united bloc against the ruling coalition accused of nepotism and corruption. The ongoing crisis between Russia and Ukraine may affect Moldova; First of all Russia maintains military forces in Transnistrian ground and secondly it shares common borders with Ukraine which cannot go unnoticed by international stakeholders. One should keep an eye on current political (and public) trend on reunification with Romania. The "Transnistria case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.*



**MONTENEGRO:** January 21<sup>st</sup>,

one of the most important tasks in 2019 and something we are focused on is the opening of Chapter 8 (Competition). Hopefully, that will happen during the Romanian EU Presidency said for "Pobjeda" Chief EU negotiator, Aleksandar

Drljevic. As far as the EU negotiations are concerned, Drljevic said that the previous year had been very intense. New structure for the EU integration process had been established and the European Integration Office had been formed providing a new dimension in the whole process. Speaking of opening Chapter 8, Drljevic said that Montenegro had performed all the activities for fulfilling five starting measuring instruments. *"I will remind that the EU insisted first and foremost on the establishment of the legislative framework and formation of an independent operation body that will exercise control of state aid in accordance with the new legislation. Adoption of the Law on the Control of State Aid and Law on the Amendments to the Law on Protection of Competition, the control of state aid has been delegated to an independent authority – Agency for the Protection of Competition. In order to avoid political or any other influence on the work of the Agency, the Law stipulates clear restrictions for the election of the members of the Council of the Agency,"* the negotiator said. He added that they were preparing the negotiation position in this chapter, so that they can be ready for the invitation of the EU. *"Opening this last chapter in the EU negotiation process will mean that Montenegro has strengthened internal readiness for the membership and that the year-long work on the improvement of the rule of law system, democratization of society and improvement of life quality is producing results, and that is the essential objective of this process",* Drljevic concluded. ([www.cdm.me](http://www.cdm.me))

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, Montenegrin minority in Albania, and Albanian one in Montenegro are the most reliable bridge of cross-border cooperation between two countries, the President of



Montenegro Milo Djukanovic said. He has met in Podgorica with Albanian colleague Ilir Meta, who is staying in a two-day official visit to Montenegro. The Montenegrin President, after meeting with his Albanian counterpart, said that special attention has been paid to further cooperation between the two countries. The two Presidents agreed, as Djukanovic said, that dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina must result in a solution which will not endanger the stability of the region. *“Our belief is that Macedonia [F.Y.R.O.M] will take its chance. We discussed issues regarding BiH. We talked about improving minority rights of the two countries, as well. Montenegrin minority in Albania, and Albanian one in Montenegro, are the most reliable cross-border bridge of cooperation,”* Djukanovic said. (www.rtcg.me)

- January 26<sup>th</sup>, Montenegrin Ministry of Defense has initiated the procurement procedure for 67 armored all-terrain vehicles to be used by the Army of Montenegro. The Ministry plans to borrow 30 million euro for the purchase of 67 armored all-terrain vehicles, as envisaged by the 2019 Budget Law. The Government's documents state budget allocations for 2019 will go up by 2.98% compared to last year, due to vehicle purchases and payment of installments for helicopters, wrote Pobjeda daily. *“After all tactical and technical features had been determined; the Ministry of Defense consulted some world's top this-kind-of-vehicle producers from different countries. So far, we have had consultations with the following companies: Iveco Defence Vehicles –Italy, Urovesa – Spain, Nurol Makina and BMC –Turkey, Elbit Systems – Israel, Lockheed Martin and Oshkosh Defence LLC –the United States of America,”* the Ministry of Defense told Pobjeda daily. When asked about the

fundamental features of the armored all-terrain vehicles that are to be purchased, the Ministry said special attention will be paid to meeting the international standards. In addition, the Ministry will also strive for meeting the existing international standards in the area of protection and security of the crew belonging to defense. (www.cdm.me)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Although the country enjoys a period of “euphoria”, major reforms should be implemented in order the country to come closer to the EU. The EP assessment is positive praising the state's efforts to implement major reforms, but on the other hand it underlines the problems of the rule of law, media freedom, corruption, money laundering, and organized crime. However, the EP expressly states that Montenegro under certain conditions may be able to access the EU by 2025. The Government promotes state's political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment. Although the Government takes concrete measures against corruption, organized crime, and money laundering it is assessed that a lot should be done to reach such a level of economic activity; mainly in the field of public administration, public sector corruption, and money laundering. Imprisonment of opposition MPs is a worrying and alarming sign regarding rule of law and democratic values in the country. Montenegro shows activity within NATO trying to prove that it is an equal partner of the alliance with military capacity according to NATO standards. Moreover, it tries to modernize and strengthen its operational capabilities and in this context it raised its defense budget aiming at purchasing new assets such as armored vehicles.*



**ROMANIA:** January 21<sup>st</sup>, in the current political context, some forces see as opportune *“to discredit the role of German minority in this shared Romania,”* Cord Meier-Klodt, the Ambassador of Germany to Bucharest, said. He mentioned these are *“individual voices”* that do not represent the opinion of the majority. *“Throughout last year, and of course on December 1<sup>st</sup>, we celebrated together 100 years since the forming of modern Romania. This year, we celebrate 100 years since several ethnic communities and minorities joined the new state. The vote of the Germans in Bucovina, in November 1918, was followed on January 8th, 1919 by the Saxon Assembly in Medias, then by the support of Germans in Basarabia and of the Banat Swabians. These are important events, festive and filled with symbols in the history of the new state. Still, in the current political context, where some forces in the country continue to see as opportune the discrediting of the role of the German minority in this shared Romania, these events are more relevant than ever,”* the Ambassador said. The Ambassador made the statements at an event marking 100 years since the Saxon Assembly in Medias. Although the voices that aim to discredit are singular and do not represent the position of the majority, they need to be disputed firmly, in the future as well. *“Regardless of how loud they sound, they have a limited basis and target objectives that are more than transparent. They do not represent the opinion of the majority of Romania’s population, in relation to the German minority. We should have this in mind, when we firmly oppose these voices. Let us never forget how the majority think or feel, to calibrate correctly our actions and to keep things in proportion,”* he said. The Ambassador’s statement came as President Klaus

Iohannis was the target of declarations or doctored photos where he was associated with Nazism. A county councilor from Vrancea, who had been elected on the lists of the ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), shared last week, on social media a photo of Iohannis dressed as a Nazi officer. The National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) fined last year Darius Valcov, a former Finance Minister and a current economic adviser of Prime Minister Viorica Dancila, for suggesting in a video the Democratic Forum of Germans is a Nazi organization. The video, which Valcov posted on social media, included an image of the President edited to make him look like Adolf Hitler. The CNCD found that the former Education Minister Liviu Pop also made discriminatory statements concerning the same organization. ([www.romania-insider.com](http://www.romania-insider.com))

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, the Prime Minister Viorica Dancila has sent a new letter to President Klaus Iohannis asking him to appoint her proposals for the vacant Ministries, Olguta Vasilescu for the Regional Development and Mircea Draghici for the Transports portfolio. Dancila argues that she has the exclusive right to appreciate and to choose the people who are proposed to be part of the Government. The Premier’s letter comes after the Head of state had also sent her a letter last Thursday, explaining why he had refused these nominations, arguing the documents accompanying the proposals of Vasilescu and Draghici are incomplete, more precisely that the criminal record certificate is the only document that certifies the legal situation of a person. Dancila has also said that a gridlock of the two ministries must be avoided. She told President Iohannis that *“his insistence”* to communicate in written *“is ridiculous”*, taking the constitutional

prerogatives and relations “*in derision.*” In the end, Dancila reiterated the demand for the Head of state to issue the decrees appointing Olguta Vasilescu and Mircea Draghici for the Development and Transports Ministries. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, the opposition parties might file a censure motion on the first day of the new parliamentary session starting on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 Liberal senator Alina Gorghiu said. She said that “*all this dark cloud that will pour hail over the rule of law could be stopped only if PSD stopped ruling.*” “*At this point, the most important trigger (for PSD) is President Iohannis, otherwise they would have all state power at their hand. Of course, there are always the options to refer these emergency ordinance to the Ombudsman, there is also the censure motion if we want this Cabinet to be toppled down, even the referendum option, a tool at the President’s hand,*” Gorghiu said. The National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) Senator would like the Opposition to join forces, arguing there will be a reaction from the Presidency and the civil society regarding the emergency ordinances on judiciary. “*Either they adopt these ordinances or not, in politics, the attempt of his kind must be severely punished and a reaction is needed,*” Gorghiu said, adding that the entire Opposition must be “*on the same side.*” A coalition-building process is needed when it comes to the roadmap on judiciary, she said. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government has been transformed into an “open battle” leading the political functionality in a deadlock. The President rejects*

*the Government’s proposals one after another leading in institutional and constitutional deadlock. Apart from that the state looks divided in major institutional issues such as national defense, justice, and security. Romania took over the Presidency of the Council of EU facing criticism and non-confidence by the EU member states’ high officials. In this context, one should add the direct European Parliament warning for activating article 7 of the EU Treaty (suspending certain rights of an EU member state when a country is considered at risk of breaching the EU’s core values). It is assessed that the Romanian Government is reaching a deadlock which could overthrow it only through early elections. On the other hand, it is “unrealistic” a state holding the EU Presidency to face snap elections; It could be detrimental. However, opposition prepares a censure motion against the Government by February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019. One should also take into consideration that the ruling coalition has lost majority in the Chamber of deputies which makes things more complex. Iohannis strongly opposes in Government’s plans to intervene in judicial system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state’s justice. As a conclusion, the state faces political abnormality in many levels which at the moment could be resolved only by early parliamentary elections. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning has become an advanced base close to Russia. Its strategic importance and role has been upgraded and high level NATO exercises take place in its territory. Current crisis between Russia and Ukraine may affect Romania’s security situation as a forward NATO base.*





**SERBIA:** January 21<sup>st</sup>, Serbian

Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic said that the next session of the UN Security Council was scheduled to take place in February 2019. Kosovo is on its agenda, Dacic said. He added that Equatorial Guinea would be chairing the session, expected to take place on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The Foreign Minister said that EU High Representative Federica Mogherini's view is that any solution for Kosovo had to be presented to the Security Council. *"What has been done so far does not need to be discussed before the Security Council, but any attempt at a durable solution will bring the matter back to the Council, as it is only logical to replace the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 with another in that case,"* Dacic said. The Serbian Minister repeated that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had written to Mogherini, asking her to inform him about the status of the talks, and that she did not respond right away, but later, saying that the EU respected Russia's role in the process. *"It is good to know that friendly states, too, Russia and China, will have important roles to play,"* Dacic said. The Minister explained he did not mean that the format of the Belgrade - Pristina talks would change, but if it turned out that it might have a positive effect, it could be possible to involve everyone in terms of organization. *"The U.S. has been since the beginning, but Russia has not; this is not good, and it is something we have been very critical of, but it was Serbia that asked for the dialog to be moved to Brussels. That was a bad decision, because friendly states are not participating,"* Dacic said. (www.b92.net)

- January 23<sup>rd</sup>, Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said that the Government will continue to work on resolving the problems of media outlets in Serbia.

According to the Government, she added that an urgent meeting with representatives of the media and journalist associations is needed in order to continue working on the development of a media strategy. In her address to the journalists in Senta, Brnabic said that the problem is rather complex, but that the Government will continue to work on solving the problems that the media outlets are facing, just as it works on solving all other problems in Serbia, one at a time, but that results can be seen only after some time. Brnabic expressed her hope that the work on the media strategy will continue, and that the next step is a public debate, assessing that it would not be serious if people who made the first draft of the media strategy did not participate in the public debate. (www.b92.net)

- January 24<sup>th</sup>, Prishtina will withdraw taxes on goods from central Serbia sooner or later, President Aleksandar Vucic said, but also stressed that this cost Serbia a lot. Asked by journalists in Davos to comment on Avni Arifi, the Head of the Ramush Haradinaj's cabinet, saying that the Government in Pristina could temporarily suspend taxes (pending a comprehensive agreement with Belgrade), Vucic noted in a statement that this would happen sooner or later. *"Whether they will abolish, suspend or otherwise find some other way, I do not care at all. They have inflicted enormous damage and brought tremendous tensions. I said that this revokal will happen and it will happen. Nevertheless, we pay a high price,"* Vucic said. However, he said, no one will compensate this, neither Pristina nor the EU, nor anyone else. In Davos Vucic met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn. After the meeting with Merkel, he said she had invited him to visit Berlin again and that they had mostly talked about Kosovo and

Serbia's European integration. Vucic said that she respected Serbia's wish to talk and reach a compromise with Pristina. The Serbian President said Chancellor Merkel showed understanding regarding the import fees Pristina had introduced on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. (www.b92.net)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*It is assessed that Serbia has followed so far a successful diplomatic strategy regarding Kosovo achieving to be appeared in the international community as a reasonable voice seeking a compromise resolution via dialogue regarding the Kosovo case. Apart from that Serbia took in advantage that it is a member of the UN, while Kosovo it is not. In this context, Serbia pushed the UNSC for a more active role in resolution process sending a message to the EU that its dialogue process has reached a deadlock. It is estimated that Serbia seeks the engagement of Russia and China which are considered as friendly towards Serbian arguments. Security situation is complex and uncertain since Serbia apart from political and diplomatic means has engaged its military and security forces. The Armed Forces are in high readiness alert but Vucic tried to de-escalate situation by stating that war is not a possible solution. However, none could predict Serbia's reaction in a possible accidental or pre-planned (provocation included) incident in Northern Kosovo against local Serbs. One should have in mind that top state officials have said in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. It is assessed that a possible Kosovo Police operation in the north or security forces deployment may provoke Serbia's security forces engagement for the protection of Serbian population; however,*

*this scenario is not very likely. At the moment, Serbia looks like acting in accordance with the international law aiming at reducing tension in the region. In other words state's leadership is acting in a "reasonable" and "wise" way avoiding mistakes of the past which have isolated Serbia from the international community. Of course, under these circumstances none could speak for restarting of Belgrade – Pristina dialogue. There are certain analysts who claim that such situation will inevitably lead in Kosovo partition with the north part going to Serbia. Some of them claim that this scenario has already agreed by Vucic and Thaci. Serbian repayment will be Kosovo recognition. By expressing neutrality and maintaining equal distance from the U.S.A and Russia it moves in an environment of fragile balance.*



**SLOVENIA:** January 24<sup>th</sup>, the Defense Ministry has drafted a resolution on the national security strategy to beef up the national security system at a time of changing global security threats. The document lists cybersecurity, hybrid threats, terrorism, extremism and migration as priorities. The resolution also foresees an enhanced role for SOVA Intelligence Agency. The document was prepared by the State Secretary at the Ministry of Defense, Klemen Groselj, with his working team. He explained that the key reason for the preparation of a new national security strategy was that they “*wanted to respond at a strategic national level to the changes in the modern security environment that we have seen over the last ten years.*” (www.dnevnik.si, www.sta.si)

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, maritime operation SOPHIA against smugglers of migrants in the Mediterranean, will continue despite Germany's

decision not to replace its ships participating in the operation in February 2019. Slovenia, which participates with the patrol boat “Triglav” and four officers in command structures, will not withdraw from the operation. Germany does not withdraw from the operation, as it will retain its members in the command structures of the operation. German decision was harshly criticized by the Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini who stressed that the mandate of SOPHIA’s operation is against all migrants who seek to approach Italy reminding that about 50,000 migrants have already come to Italy.

- January 27<sup>th</sup>, Culture Minister Dejan Presicek offered his resignation in a letter to Prime Minister Marjan Sarec the Culture Ministry said. Sarec is to announce his decision on the fate of the Minister who has been accused of bullying and abuse of office on Monday. The Culture Ministry's in-house trade union added to the mounting pressure against Presicek on Friday, urging Sarec to replace him. The union appeared to submit to the bullying allegations raised against Presicek, who has had several distinguished individuals speak out in his defense. Presicek stressed in his letter that he accepted the post of the Minister of Culture with the desire to create the conditions necessary for the creation of Slovenian culture, creativity and expression to the fullest extent possible as a driver of social identity and progress. He also accepted the ministerial position with the responsibility to move things that have been standing for years and for the better. He denied that he would ignore the oath of respect for the constitutional order and the parts in his work. (www.dnevnik.si, www.sta.si)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability. The Government has to address several internal social issues (increase of minimum wage, health care, pensions etc) which may test governmental cohesion. Border dispute with Croatia is still ongoing and former Government of Miro Cerar filed a lawsuit against Croatia over its refusal to implement the border arbitration. Although the Prime Minister Marjan Sarec announced that his Government will follow the same policy in the issue, he showed up with an attitude of compromise by claiming that his country will not stop Croatia’s accession in the Schengen zone. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. 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.*



**TURKEY:** January 24<sup>th</sup>, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recept Tayyip Erdogan discussed steps needed to stabilize the situation in Syria's Idlib province where the joint battle against “terrorist” organizations will continue. Earlier on Wednesday, the Russian Foreign Ministry said the situation in the region, where Moscow and Ankara have tried to create a de-escalation zone, was rapidly deteriorating and that it was almost under the full control of Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) - a rebel group that was previously linked to al-Qaeda. He said Turkey is doing a lot to remedy situation, but that more action by both Ankara and Moscow is required to “liquidate the actions of terrorist groups.” In September 2018, Turkey pledged to disarm and remove HTS fighters in Idlib when a deal was signed between Turkey and Russia. The deal succeeded in

preventing a Russia-backed Syrian Government offensive from launching in Idlib which is home to nearly three million people. Putin also said he had agreed to host a summit soon where Russia, Turkey and Iran could discuss the situation in Syria under the Astana peace track. The two leaders discussed the situation in Syria as the nearly eight-year conflict winds down. Various players - including numerous armed groups backed by different allies - seek to gain control of territory. Ankara is seeking to establish a 30km-long safe zone along the Syrian border to contain a US-allied Kurdish militia that it considers a "terrorist" group. During Wednesday's joint press conference, Erdogan said the leaders did not have any disagreements about establishing this planned safe zone, without revealing any details. Al Jazeera's Rory Challands, reporting from Moscow, said the two leaders have not reached a concrete deal over two main issues - establishing the so-called safe zone, and the situation in Idlib. (www.aljazeera.com)

- January 24<sup>th</sup>, Turkey, Russia, and China came to the aid of Venezuela's leader after the United States declared Nicolas Maduro was no longer its President. The pledges of support came after opposition leader Juan Guaido declared himself interim President of Venezuela in an address to tens of thousands of people on the streets of the capital, Caracas. "*We are with you,*" Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told Maduro in a telephone call, according to his Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin. "*My brother Maduro. Stay strong, we are by your side,*" Erdogan said. The Turkish President said the democratic process must be respected. Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said it is "*very strange*" that Guaido declared himself President despite the country already having an elected leader; Maduro. "*And*

*some countries recognised him. This situation may lead to a chaos,*" Cavusoglu said. He added Turkey is trying to support Venezuela's economy as it experiences serious challenges. Since last year, Turkey has been refining and certifying Venezuelan gold after Maduro switched operations from Switzerland over concerns that further sanctions against his country could see it impounded. Russia, meanwhile, warned the US not to intervene militarily in Venezuela, saying its support for Guaido is a "*path to lawlessness and bloodshed.*" China also voiced support for Maduro. (www.aljazeera.com)

- January 26<sup>th</sup>, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's Government has condemned Turkey's military presence in northern Syria as a violation of a 1998 protocol between the two countries. The Foreign Ministry in Damascus accused Ankara of repeatedly breaching the Adana deal throughout Syria's eight-year war. "*Since 2011, the Turkish regime has violated and continues to violate this agreement,*" a Ministry source said. The source accused Turkey of "*supporting terrorists*" using the Government's term for both Turkish-backed rebels and other armed groups including former al-Qaeda affiliate Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). It said Ankara is breaching the deal by "*occupying Syrian territory via terrorist organizations linked to it or directly via Turkish military forces.*" Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has insisted the Adana Protocol gives his country the right to deploy troops in the neighboring country. Turkey backs Syrian rebel factions who control part of the north and has observation posts across rebel-held Idlib province as part of a "*de-escalation*" agreement signed in 2017 with Assad's ally Russia, and Iran. Ankara has threatened for months to launch a new offensive in northern Syria to drive out US-

backed Syrian Kurdish fighters. It has twice led incursions into northern Syria in 2016 and 2018. Since then, its forces and allied Syrian proxies have controlled a patch of territory on the border. Ankara has repeatedly threatened to march on areas further east, where the US-allied fighters of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) are in control. The YPG is seen as an effective ground force by the US in the fight against DAESH, but Turkey says it is linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Ankara and Washington list as a terrorist group. Damascus has regained control of almost two-thirds of the country after Russia intervened militarily in 2015. (www.aljazeera.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. Turkish – U.S relations have strongly been harmed forcing Ankara to approach new allies such as Russia. Although Turkey re-examines its relations with the EU in an effort to avoid international and regional isolation, the EU sends messages of terminating the EU – Turkey accession talks. Turkish Armed Forces have been engaged in military operations against Kurds and PKK in Northern Iraq and against YPG Kurds in Syria as well. The U.S reconsiders its unconditional withdrawal from Syria after domestic and international critics. Protection of Syrian Kurds and YPG forces is a priority for the U.S troops which will remain in Syria as long as it is necessary. In this context, dialogue between Turkey and the U.S is ongoing aiming at reaching*

*a common point of understanding. Although Erdogan announced that Turkey will not conduct a new military operation against Syrian Kurds, it reinforces its military presence in the area. New forces appeared in the Turkish – Syrian borders conducting military drills. The General Staff has already presented not only an operational plan for an imminent operation in Syrian Manbij, but also a plan for establishing a “safe zone” in Syrian border under Turkish control. At the moment, Turkey is engaged in military operations in the territory of two other countries, it threatens to start a new operation in Syria, maintains a significant military force in North Cyprus, and threatens a NATO ally – Greece – with an armed conflict. Apart from the use or the threat of use of direct armed violence Turkey participates actively in diplomatic processes in the region (Syria negotiations, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Cyprus question, Qatar crisis etc). The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and Southeast Mediterranean. Announcement of a huge navy drill in the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea may raise tension with Cyprus and Greece. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. Regarding Turkish interests in East Mediterranean Sea it seems that they are reaching a critical point since Cypriots have already started hydrocarbon drills in their Exclusive Economic Zone via the US energy giant ExxonMobil. Is Turkey ready to move from rhetoric to action? It is rather difficult to see a direct harassment against the drill ship but none could exclude a “hot” incident in the Aegean Sea. The Turkish President and high state’s officials express Turkey’s determination to protect its interests no matter what. It seems that strengthened multilateral cooperation between*


*Greece, Israel, Cyprus and Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt raises its concerns of regional isolation in a region (Eastern Mediterranean Sea) where Turkey considers it as a preferential field of action.*


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#### NOTE

 Stable situation. No security risk

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored

 Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions

 Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk

 Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict