



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE

“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.

Copyright © 2020

“HERMES” Institute for Foreign Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy

All rights reserved



ALBANIA: January 20th, the Special Prosecution Against Corruption (SPAK) has started its work vigorously. SPAK reports that it filed the request to criminally prosecute several defendants. They are accused of drug traffic, production and fabrication of narcotics as a structured criminal group. They are also accused of committing criminal acts through organized crime, money laundering and production of narcotics. During the investigation of this case, 38 other defendants were brought to trial. So far, 63 defendants have been sent for trial. The authorities have also seized 300,000 m² of land, hotels, apartments, and vehicles with a value of around 5 million euro. (www.top-channel.tv)

- January 23rd, the “Saadi” College, which cooperates in Tirana with the Rumi Foundation, has been closed recently. The Ministry of Education declared on social media that the school was closed by request of the subject itself. The Minister, Besa Shahini explained that the reason for its closure is based only on its revenues, different from what had been speculated on news portals. “*The lack of interest to report the fact is disappointing,*” Shahini said. The “Saad” College received its permit to operate in Tirana in December 2000. (www.top-channel.tv)

- January 24th, President Ilir Meta has addressed the Venice Commission with a lengthy request, in response to a move made by the majority to seek from this body of international experts an interpretation of the situation created last November with appointments to the Constitutional Court. The request begins with a letter to Commission President Gianni Buquicchio, with mostly political evaluations. “*In the absence of a Constitutional Court for more*

than two years , in the absence of the High Court, in a crisis of representation sui generis where the Government, Parliament, all municipalities and municipal councils are in the hands of a single political force as well as the vast majority of the two independent bodies appointed by this political force, bringing about a complete imbalance of checks and balances, the country is at risk of total state capture. This context, coupled with the unilateral, unconstitutional implementation and in flagrant violation of the Venice Commission’s recommendations on justice reform, is increasingly plunging the country into illegality, unconstitutionality, and towards autocracy,” the letter reads. The clash between the parties began after Meta decided not to appoint one of the candidates for the vacancy to be filled by the Head of State, arguing that he had already filled a vacancy and it was up to Parliament to proceed with electing a candidate from the lists. According to the majority, Meta failed to abide by the 30-day deadline set by the law, and as a result, the top-ranked candidate Arta Vorpsi was automatically named. The parliament followed with the election of two candidates, while Meta subsequently decreed from his list Marsida Xhaferllari who was invited to take the oath, along with the two candidates elected by parliament. Meta spoke about an attempt by the majority to take over his powers and launched a fierce battle against the Chairman of the Justice Appointments Council, Ardian Dvorani, whom he described as the cause of the created situation and a man who had worked on behalf of the ruling majority. All of this, as well as the further decision of the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee, set up to dismiss Meta as president, to expand the scope of his work, not only on the occasion of the decree canceling the June 30th, 2019 elections, but

also on the appointments to the Constitutional Court constitute the first part of the more than 40-page petition Meta filed with the Venice Commission. Meta has addressed the commission with a variety of questions on many aspects, since the Expansion of the Inquiry Committee by Parliament; Procedures for the appointment of members of the Constitutional Court by parliament; The role of the president in the case of appointments; The role of parliament and its actions in nominating candidates and more recently the activity of the Justice Appointments Council. There are at least 38 questions in total for which Meta has requested an explanation from the Venice Commission, whose experts are expected to arrive in Tirana in the middle of next month, precisely for this debate between the parties. When last November, representatives of the international community, and especially the United States, suggested the involvement of the Venice Commission in resolving this new clash, Meta said they were looking to protect Dvorani. (www.tiranatimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political crisis is continued in Albania not only due to confrontation between the ruling majority and opposition, but also between the Government and the Albanian President, Ilir Meta. Lately, Meta has highlighted the constitutional crisis in the country by addressing the Venice Commission for the state's Constitutional Court. The EU and US put pressure on political forces to compromise and start dialogue ensuring democratic order in the country. Political instability may have direct impact in investments and opening of EU accession negotiations. Reforms should continue more intensively if the state seeks to get an accession negotiation date with the EU.

Corruption, organized crime, money laundering, drug and weapon smuggling and links between politics and organized crime are the main problems Albania should address effectively. The EU top officials keep sending encouraging messages for Albania (and North Macedonia) regarding opening of accession negotiations in coming EU summit in May 2020. Although it is claimed that France and the Netherlands will change their stand, it is still questionable if they will do it finally. Albania keeps acting as the center of Albanians all over the region seeking to influence neighboring countries politics. Relation between Albania and Kosovo with a potential new Government under Albin Kurti as the Prime Minister is a good question.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

January 23rd, the latest Transparency International (TI) report published this week showed that a significant number of countries made little to no improvement in tackling corruption, according to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2019, which saw Bosnia and Herzegovina getting the worst assessment since 2012, ranking 101 among 180 countries. According to the report, this year's analysis has shown that corruption was more pervasive in the countries where big money can flow freely into electoral campaigns and where governments listen only to the voices of wealthy or well-connected individuals. With a score of 36, Bosnia and Herzegovina significantly declined by six points on the CPI since 2012, said the report, adding that the country also suffers from weak enforcement of campaign finance regulations. During the 2018 elections, political parties and civil society organizations raised concerns over voting irregularities, threats against voters, the

misuse of public resources and unequal access to the media, said the report. *“A lack of political will and a decline in implementation of laws and regulations are real challenges,”* it added. Brutal repression and threats to voters, manipulating with lists of voters and results, with full mobilization of the state resources for the needs of the ruling political parties is pushing the country further from political responsibility and democratization, said the report, adding that, as a consequence of irregular elections, Bosnia has very questionable authorities. *“Bosnia and Herzegovina is in a situation where corruption has become an official policy at the state, entity and cantonal levels, which can be seen in every individual move of institutions – if you analyze any appointment, bid, regulation, you will see it is about a very clear, particular interest that stands behind it,”* said Srdjan Blagovcanin, Chairman of the TI Bosnia Steering Board. Based on detailed and comprehensive analyses, the TI prepared a set of measures that should systematically address the causes of corruption and they refer to the improvement of the election process, reform of judiciary with focus on vetting procedure, detailed systematic reviews of public sector and public enterprises, which should result in their rationalization and de-politicization. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 24th, a roundtable took place at premises of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Armed Forces in the capital Sarajevo on Thursday, followed by an informative briefing of the Joint Staff with the Association of diplomatic representatives accredited in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The aim of the event was to inform the military and diplomatic representatives in Bosnia about the most important activities of the Bosnian Armed Forces

in 2019 and the planned activities in the coming period. The event was hosted by Bosnian Chief of the Armed Forces Joint Staff, Lieutenant General Senad Masovic, and Deputy Chiefs of Joint Staff of BiH’s Armed Forces Major General Ivica Jerkic and Major General Gojko Knezevic. In his address to the roundtable participants, General Masovic emphasized the key results that Armed Forces achieved in 2019. Masovic stressed that the Armed Forces expect many challenges this year, the most important being the establishment of a new structure, in accordance with the 2016 Defense Review, as well as the implementation of other activities related to increasing the degree of interoperability and bringing Bosnia closer to Euro-Atlantic integrations. He stressed that it was high time for the Armed Forces to receive a development budget that would create preconditions for moving into the modernization process, which would create conditions for achieving even better results, as well as improving overall life and work. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- January 25th, leader of the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA), Bakir Izetbegovic, said on Friday that he would not allow the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH) party to impose changes to the country's election law and make the formation of the new Government of the Croat - Bosniak (Muslim Bosnians) Federation entity conditional on those changes. *“The reform of the election law should not be tied to the formation of the Federation Government,”* Izetbegovic told reporters after a meeting of his party in Sarajevo. He added that changes to the election law would take time and that the

Federation entity Government had to be formed as soon as possible to enable the continuation of reforms. The precondition for that is that the HDZ BiH, in line with an agreement with the SDA, nominates its candidate for Federation President because that official is the only one with constitutional powers to nominate the entity's new Prime Minister and Ministers. Izetbegovic called on the HDZ BiH to honor the agreement with his party and unblock the process of Government formation in the country based on the results of elections held back in October 2018. He also said that the SDA would not allow the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata - SNSD) party of Milorad Dodik to become part of the Federation entity Government. Dodik made a demand to that effect last week, saying that only the SNSD, which is in power in the Serb entity of Republika Srpska, has the right to also represent Serbs living in the Federation entity, and that it should, therefore, be given the post of the Serb Vice-President of the Federation entity and ministerial positions intended for Serbs in the Federation Government. Izetbegovic said on Friday that this would not happen as the SNSD had already gone back on some of the coalition agreements with the SDA. The SDA has therefore also decided to block the appointment of the new Head of the state-level Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA), a post for which Darko Culum, the current Serb entity Police Director considered to be unconditionally loyal to Dodik, has been nominated. Izetbegovic indirectly explained that the new SIPA Director would not be appointed until it was certain that the Bosniak candidate to be nominated by the SDA under the existing agreement would be appointed the Head of the

country's Security-Intelligence Agency (OSA). (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Rhetoric over the amendment of Dayton peace agreement is increasing in Bosnia and more politicians and analysts admit that in fact that the accord is rather a source of problems than a source of stability establishing a complicated political system and state's decision making process. Besides, the Dyaton accord violates basic human rights principles by several Bosnian citizens from accessing state institution's positions. For instance a Bosnian Roma cannot become member of the country's tripartite Presidency. However, talks of reforming Dayton Agreement may destabilize not only Bosnia, but the entire region. Political instability, poor economic performances, entities' rivalries, and problematic framework of state's structure (due to Dayton Accord) have left Bosnia far behind other Western Balkan countries towards the EU. Transparency International in its latest report claimed that "corruption has become an official policy of the state" highlighting the size of the problem. NATO is a feasible goal but only due to geopolitical and geostrategic reasons (mainly because of the Russian threat of penetration in the region) and not because of achieving the Alliance's standards. Nevertheless, Bosnian Serbs strongly reject the idea of NATO accession and this is a significant obstacle towards Bosnia's full accession in the Alliance. Despite the Council of Ministers establishment political situation in the country remains unstable due to the complicated decision-making and governance system, which blocks almost every political action due to entity's special interests. Furthermore, nationalistic

rhetoric and actions from the three entities creates certain conditions of mutual mistrust and work as a factor of potential destabilization. At the moment Bosnia is considered as a potential source of instability in the whole region of Southeast Europe. Neighboring Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs, while Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments.



BULGARIA: January 23rd, about 300 lorries are being organized to deliver the pipes required for the new connection to supply the town of Pernik with water, Bulgaria's Economy Minister Emil Karanikolov said. Pernik has been the subject of severe water restrictions for more than two months. The Government is proposing a plan to supply the town with water via Sofia's pipeline network, which will require adding more than 13km of pipelines to make the connection. The plan is to bring the water from the Belmeken Dam via the Beli Iskar Dam and on through the Sofia water supply network to Pernik. The Cabinet mandated Karanikolov, Regional Development Minister Petya Avramova and recently-appointed Environment Minister Emil Dimitrov to ask Sofia City Council to agree to the passage of water at a volume of 300 liters a second to supply Pernik's needs. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- January 24th, Bulgaria's National Assembly held a four-hour debate on a motion of no confidence in Prime Minister Boiko Borissov's coalition Government on the grounds of what the opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya - BSP,) terms the

Government's failures in environment and water policy. The motion will be put to the vote on January 29th, 2020. The motion of no confidence is the fourth since Borissov's third Government came to power in May 2017. The motion follows a water crisis lasting more than two months in the town of Pernik, and allegations about illegal imports of waste from other European countries, including Italy. BSP leader Kornelia Ninova said that the motion was tabled because of the Government's failure to protect the environment and water, which directly endangers the lives and health of Bulgarian citizens. Mustafa Karadayi, leader of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi - DPS) which has said that it is to vote in favor of the motion of no confidence, said that *"today we are in a political disaster; the result of GERB's rule. The Government's failure in the environment and water is a fact. This is the natural result of a 10-year incompetent Government."* Pavel Shopov, of Volen Siderov's Ataka (Attack) party, said that the motion was the latest attempt to hold early parliamentary elections, and throwing out the Government would delay the resolution of many problems. Ataka has not made clear whether or not it will support the motion. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- January 25th, Russian Ambassador Anatoly Makarov has been handed a note by Bulgaria's Foreign Ministry giving two Russian Embassy staff identified as involved in espionage 48 hours to leave the country. The January 24th, 2020 summoning of Makarov followed an announcement by the Prosecutor-General's office that the two Russians had been involved in espionage, on issues related to Bulgaria's electoral system and in the field of energy

security, but pre-trial proceedings had been suspended because they had diplomatic immunity. This is the second time in recent months that expulsion from Bulgaria of Russian Embassy staff named as involved in spying has taken place. Russia retaliated in early December 2019 by expelling a Bulgarian diplomat from Moscow. Bulgaria's move has been backed by the Embassies of the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. The Russian Embassy confirmed that Makarov had been summoned to the Foreign Ministry to be handed notes declaring an Embassy diplomat persona non grata and a trade representative unacceptable in accordance with the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. No evidence had been submitted that the activities of the two were incompatible with their status, the Russian Embassy said. The staff would leave Bulgaria by the deadline indicated in the notes, it said. *"The Russian side reserves the right to take retaliatory measures. At the same time, we consider the decision of the Bulgarian authorities to disseminate this information in the public space before the official notification to the Embassy is not consistent with the traditionally constructive spirit of relations between our states,"* the Russian Embassy said. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Boyko Borissov's Government is stable. The "lack of water" crisis in the city of Pernik is to be resolved but had a negative impact on Government's efficiency and led in resignation of the Minister of Environment and Water, Neno Dimov. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively. The country pays special attention to energy

security developing several projects. Bulgaria expelled two more Russian diplomats accused of espionage. It is the second time Bulgaria expels Russian diplomats last months. It is assessed as a Bulgarian reaction towards increased Russian activity in a country that is considered as a privileged field of Russian influence. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). However, military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards.



CROATIA: January 22nd, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Wednesday that the talks he held at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos were very useful for the strengthening of bilateral relations as well as for the positioning of Croatia on the global scene in the context of its current EU presidency. *"Yesterday and today we held a number of meetings... the talks in Davos were very useful, in terms of bilateral relations, our role regarding various topics and dossiers that are important for them in the context of Croatia's EU presidency and generally for our positioning in forums like this one,"* Plenkovic told Croatian reporters in Davos. The Croatian Prime Minister attended on Tuesday two panels and held talks with a number of political officials and business people, and on Wednesday he met with French Economy and Finance Minister Bruno La Maire. An overarching topic of the 50th World Economic Forum is social responsibility. The forum must take into account challenges such as climate change and topics that Croatia imposed in the

European Council, such as the issue of demography and emigration of people from rural areas to urban ones and from less developed to more developed member states, said Plenkovic. These topics were adopted in discussions held this year, which was not the case last year, said Plenkovic. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- January 23rd, Croatia is protecting its borders properly, Germany's Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said in Zagreb on Thursday after meeting with his Croatian counterpart Davor Bozinovic. Seehofer, who arrived in Zagreb for an informal meeting of EU Interior Ministers scheduled for Friday, told the reporters he did not have any objections to the work the Croatian Police and other security services were doing regarding protecting the longest external EU border, that between Croatia and Bosnia. The reporters asked the question in light of numerous reports by migrants, NGOs, and the international media who accuse the Croatian border Police of using pushbacks and excessive force against migrants who are trying to cross the border from Bosnia into Croatia. A former leader of the Christian-Social Union and Prime Minister of Bavaria, Seehofer was a vocal critic of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's "open door" policy toward migrants at the height of the migrant crisis in 2015. "When it comes to protecting the security of citizens and the country, a strong Government is needed to ensure the rule of law. That is how it is in Germany and that is the duty of Interior Ministers," Seehofer said on Thursday, adding he agreed "one hundred percent" with Croatian Interior Minister Bozinovic regarding issues of migrations and security. "That will be the topic which we will be dealing with for some time yet," he said, and added that Germany will help Croatia

as much as it can in protecting the EU's external border. In that context, Germany donated ten thermal-vision cameras to Croatia to supervise the border. Bozinovic said that he would cooperate with Seehofer in breaking up smuggling rings, adding the two had agreed that the EU has to help Greece more, as it is the first point of entry for migrants from the Middle East toward Europe. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- January 24th, the Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) and the SNH Trade Union of Croatian journalists on Friday most sharply condemned the "atrocious, disgusting and brutal attack" on a female reporter, Andrea Topic who was attacked by four men while reporting in the field. Topic was attacked by four men in Ivanbegovina near the town of Imotski while reporting about the house Health Minister Milan Kujundzic was born in. The Police on Friday arrested the four men aged 42, 43, 66 and 68. Zovko underlined that HND and SNH would do their best to inform the international public of this incident. SNH President Maja Sever warned that this case indicated a trend of the deteriorating status of reporters and conditions they are working in and that they are increasingly being exposed to pressure, scare tactics and attacks. HND Vice President, Danka Derifaj warned that for months journalists had been receiving very unpleasant responses and insults when asking politicians about their work, assets or matters that the public had the right to know about. She accused politicians of contributing to this sort of atmosphere with their "conduct, stance and avoiding to answer important questions." Instead of answers, it is insults that are hurled at reporters, she said. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country enjoys political stability. Croatia, a Western Balkan country, runs the EU Presidency and this is very important for EU enlargement in Western Balkans. Croatian top officials have repeatedly stated that the country will support the region's states for accelerating their route towards the EU. The country received a positive recommendation by the European Commission for implementing all necessary criteria for entering the Schengen Zone. However, the final political decision by the member states requires a unanimous vote and it is expected to become a field of confrontation between Croatia and Slovenia. Slovenia has already expressed its intention to block Croatia's accession to the Schengen Area due to their border dispute. However, Croatia expresses confidence that finally it will get full support (Slovenia including) for entering the Zone. Croatia insists that the arbitration rule is not valid and the dispute should be resolved through bilateral negotiations; a position which is unacceptable for Slovenia. A similar situation is ongoing in OECD where Croatia's accession is currently blocked by Slovenia. Under these circumstances, Croatia should start thinking of dialogue and compromise since its stance has repercussions in state's national interests namely accession in "Schengen Zone" and OECD. Croatia implements a hard-line foreign policy with its neighboring countries maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. Top officials do not hesitate to openly interfere in Bosnian domestic affairs in the name of Bosnian Croats. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Currently, the Ministry of

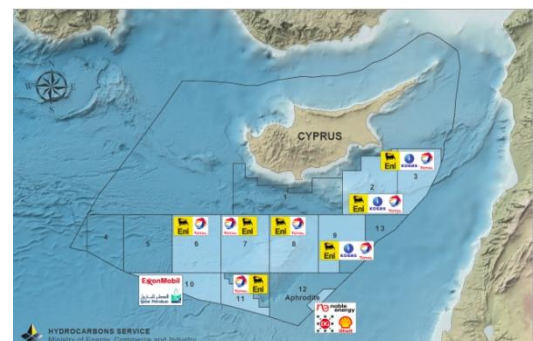
Defense has restarted its efforts for acquiring 12 modern fighter jets since Croatia is a NATO member without operational Air Force.



CYPRUS: January 20th, the Government said on Monday it is taking all necessary diplomatic steps to denounce Turkey's latest unlawful act in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), while Ankara appeared to be taunting Nicosia by promising to 'share' whatever natural gas it may discover in the island's block 8. "We are of course continuing our efforts through diplomatic and legal actions to cease this behavior," President Nicos Anastasiades said on Monday night. Earlier in the day Government Spokesman Kyriacos Koushios had said Turkey was developing into a "pirate state in the eastern Mediterranean." "Despite repeated calls by the international community, especially the EU, for it to immediately cease its illegal actions, Turkey continues to violate Cyprus' EEZ and continental shelf," he said. He added that at the EU Foreign Affairs Council currently taking place, Foreign Minister Nicos Christodoulides will be asking his counterparts as well as EU officials to mount "an effective intervention, not only regarding Turkey's illegal incursion into Cyprus' EEZ and continental shelf, but also for other matters concerning our region." Media reports on Monday said that Paris was sending its "Charles de Gaulle" aircraft carrier to the Eastern Mediterranean as a more dynamic measure. Anastasiades neither confirmed nor denied the reports, saying only that France was 'undoubtedly' playing a leading role in efforts to suppress Turkey's actions in the area. "I do not want to comment on anything else," he said. French energy giant TOTAL has ownership of

blocks 6 and 11 in partnership with Italian energy company ENI. Koushios dismissed as completely unfounded Turkey's claim that by drilling in Cyprus' EEZ it is protecting the rights and interests of Turkish Cypriots. Over the weekend, Turkey issued a marine advisory by which it reserved for drilling operations an area inside Cyprus' offshore block 8. The advisory stated the Turkish drillship "Yavuz", supported by other vessels, would be carrying out drilling from January 18th to May 24th, 2020. The reserved area is located at the southeast corner of block 8, which the north says falls within its own waters based on a "continental shelf delimitation agreement" signed with Turkey in 2011. The precise position of the Yavuz is unknown, as the ship appears to have switched off its transponder. But according to earlier reports in the Turkish media it was located approximately 100 nautical miles off the south of the island, within block 8. It is the third time that Turkey will be conducting illegal drilling activities in Cyprus' EEZ, but the second time it is drilling in acreage already licensed by the Cyprus Government. It is the first time, however, that Turkey is drilling in an area claimed not by itself, but rather by northern Cyprus. In a statement, main opposition Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού – AKEL) lambasted the Government over its inaction and for "fostering illusions and complacency." "The Cypriot people are asking why the EU has yet to impose measures against Turkey, measures that have been pending for months," it said. AKEL noted that escalating tensions will be to the detriment of Cyprus, and called for a resumption of reunification talks as the only rational way forward. Meantime Ankara seemed to be goading Nicosia. In a statement, Turkish foreign ministry

spokesperson Hami Aksoy said "In this license area, as the co-owners of the island, Turkish Cypriots have rights as much as the Greek Cypriots. Should oil and natural gas be found in this area, both parties will share the revenues together. In this regard, the proposal made by the Turkish Cypriot authorities on 13 July 2019 concerning the equitable sharing of the hydrocarbon resources and revenues is still valid and is an important opportunity for a solution." Amid tensions, it was reported that a scheduled drill by Cyprus in block 6 – licensed to ENI and TOTAL – will be delayed due to technical difficulties encountered by the leased drillship. Daily Politis said the Tungsten Explorer, currently operating in Egyptian waters, had been scheduled to drill at the "Kronos" site in block 6 in late January or early February. But due to a technical glitch, the drillship had to temporarily suspend operations in the Egyptian EEZ. It is now expected to finish its work there in 20 days, after which it has already been leased for exploratory drilling in Lebanon's EEZ. By the time it is done in Lebanon, it could be late March or early April, the paper reported. The ENI-TOTAL consortium is planning at least three drills in Cypriot waters in 2020-2021. (www.cyprus-mail.com)



Offshore exploration licenses

(Photo source: www.mcit.gov.cy)

- January 22nd, the Government essentially confirmed a media report suggesting Turkey had somehow obtained studies carried out by Italian energy firm ENI prior to drilling for natural gas in an offshore field off Cyprus' south coast. In an interview with Greek state broadcaster ERT, Government Spokesman Kyriacos Kousios said the information the Government had, along with Turkey's moves in the area pointed to "*that they have obtained certain studies.*" The Spokesman was quick to stress that the Government was not suggesting any of the energy companies involved had given Turkey the data relating to a field in block 8 of Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). "*I do not think, and I am not claiming in any way that either of the two companies have given (Turkey) the studies,*" he said. "*But to go to the particular target ... it seems that through some way they have information about the studies,*" Kousios added. It followed a report on Tuesday in daily Phileleftheros that Turkey's drillship "Yavuz" was on the way to a target previously surveyed by ENI, which owns the concession along with France's TOTAL. The paper said after its failure to find gas in previous drills inside the island's EEZ, Turkey chose to target a field which according to surveys could hold gas reserves. However, Politis journalist Chrysanthos Manoli wrote on Wednesday that detailed data regarding the drilling had been published in August 2017 on the website of the state environment department, which publishes all environmental studies submitted when applying for a permit. The studies were also published on the webpage of the labor inspection department. The Government subsequently intervened and the department stopped publishing studies relating to natural gas drilling, Manoli wrote. The target in question had been either abandoned or

downgraded by ENI, he said. Foreign Minister Nicos Christodoulides said it would be a negative development if Turkey drilled in the field since it would raise issues with licensed companies which expect a return on their investment. The Minister said EU sanctions against individuals and companies involved in Ankara's activities in the EEZ could escalate depending on developments. Speaking to state broadcaster CyBC radio, the Minister admitted, however, that these sanctions would not lead to Turkey ending its illegal activities off Cyprus. "*The most important is that it sends a clear message to those involved that there are consequences,*" he said. Commenting on President Nicos Anastasiades' statements on Tuesday that one should not create expectations that Europe was ready to take harsher measures against Turkey, Christodoulides said the President was being pragmatic. He explained that several EU countries are concerned about Turkey's threats on the migration issue while each country has in mind its own interests. On Tuesday, the US said it remained "*deeply concerned*" by reports of Turkey's drilling operations in the waters off Cyprus and has urged the Turkish authorities to halt them. "*The United States remains deeply concerned by reports of Turkey's drilling operations in the waters off Cyprus, including plans to dispatch the 'Yavuz' south of Limassol,*" a US State Department Spokesman said. "*This provocative step raises tensions in the region. We urge Turkish authorities to halt these operations,*" he added. He said that the US policy on Cyprus's EEZ is "*longstanding and has not changed; The United States recognizes the right of the Republic of Cyprus to develop the resources in its exclusive economic zone.*" "*Only the Republic of Cyprus can assert maritime claims from the territory of Cyprus,*" he said. According to the Spokesman,

“energy resource development in the Eastern Mediterranean should foster cooperation, increase dialogue between the two communities and among regional neighbors, and provide a foundation for durable energy security and economic prosperity.” Turkey had announced its intention to start drilling off Cyprus last year and has so far carried out a handful in the west and east. In response, on July 15th, 2019, EU Foreign Ministers endorsed measures against Turkey’s actions. On Monday, they decided to task the Relex working group to expedite the sanction list on Turkey’s illegal drilling. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 24th, Cyprus is blocking new EU sanctions against several officials from Russia-annexed Crimea in a bid to secure EU backing for tougher action against Turkey in a separate row over drilling for hydrocarbons, three diplomatic sources said. Nicosia denied linking the two issues and said it needed time to review the proposed measures against the Crimean officials. Cyprus, backed by the EU, accuses Turkey of drilling illegally for oil and gas in its territorial waters. The EU has prepared the ground for travel bans and asset freezes but has postponed saying which Turkish officials they would target in order to give Ankara time to change tack. The EU has also agreed to blacklist more officials in Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, but the sanctions require unanimous support from all 28 member states and Cyprus has recently blocked the process at the technical level, the sources said. *“The way Cyprus is hijacking the Russia listings has deeply irritated its friends and partners around the table. It is all the more surprising since Cyprus has enjoyed unparalleled solidarity from its EU partners over the last few*

months [in the dispute with Turkey],” said one EU diplomat. A second diplomat, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said Poland and Germany were among those pushing Cyprus to stop blocking the new Crimea measures. *“The Cypriots want to have sanctions on Turkey for drilling and have been frustrated that it is taking time,”* said the second diplomat. *“This is why they are meddling with the Crimea listings,”* he concluded. Cyprus’ Foreign Ministry rejected the criticism. *“There is no connection made between the two sanctions regimes. We are in the process of reviewing the information provided with regard to the Ukraine sanctions,”* Cypriot Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Demetris Samuel told Reuters. On Turkey, Samuel added *“Our aim is to see them [the EU decisions] implemented. We feel that it is important... to expedite and finalize this work with regards to the listings.”* A third EU diplomat said he still hoped the list of sanctioned Crimean officials would be approved *“early next week,”* or the matter would have to go before EU Ambassadors. *“Everything depends on Cyprus and whether they will drop their objections,”* he said. If sanctions are imposed, the asset freezes and travel bans are likely to target the Turkish military and captains of the drilling ships, rather than senior Turkish officials, diplomats said. The decision aims to punish Ankara for violating Cyprus’ maritime economic zone by drilling off the divided island. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus is entering in a critical time regarding its sovereign rights and national interests. Turkey has reserved an area within the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for hydrocarbon drills starting from January 18th to May 24th, 2020.

“Yavuz” drillship accompanied by a Turkish Navy frigate and other vessels has already arrived in the region planning to start drilling in field “8” of the Republic of Cyprus already licensed to the consortium of the Italian ENI and French TOTAL. It seems that this time the Turks have technical data for the region (still not clear how they got it) and they are going to search in an area that has already been explored and it is very likely to “hide” hydrocarbons. Cyprus is trying to block Turkish activity by diplomatic means but neither the US calls, nor the EU threats for sanctions are effective. Only France seeks to get a more active role by sending its aircraft carrier “Charles de Gaulle” but it is rather unlikely to see the French Navy blocking the Turkish drillship from the Cypriot waters. Greece is also unwilling in political level to send naval forces in Cyprus for defending its sovereign rights aiming to avoid escalation of tension with Turkey in the Aegean or South of Crete. Cyprus has to defend its sovereignty and national interests by itself and the fact is that it lacks aeronautical forces to do so. Trilateral cooperation between Cyprus, Greece and Israel or Cyprus, Greece and Egypt have been proved effective in plans and agreements but their implementation is rather questionable since there is lack of security in certain levels. Under these circumstances, it is doubtful if the EastMed will finally be implemented. Besides, the Turkish goal is to isolate Cyprus and Greece by forcing Egypt and Israel to choose Turkey as the transit country for transferring their gas to the European market. Turkey is determined to establish its presence in the region and especially within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claiming the Turkish Cypriot community rights. It maintains a significant military force on the island (Army

Corps seize) and it reinforce it with modern systems such as UAVs. As long as tension remains in eastern Mediterranean, there is always a high risk of an armed “hot” incident or a conflict. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: January 22nd, Greece’s Parliament elected former Council of State Head Katerina Sakellariopoulou as the country’s next President, a largely ceremonial role that also brings with it limited political powers. Sakellariopoulou, 63, won the support of 261 lawmakers in the 300-seated Parliament. She was backed by lawmakers from ruling New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND), leftist Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) opposition and the center-left Movement for Change (Κίνημα Αλλαγής - KINAL). Sakellariopoulou will serve 5 years starting on March 13th, 2020 when incumbent President Prokopis Pavlopoulos’ term comes to an end. She will be Greece’s first female Head of state. Tasoulas will visit the Council of State at 1.30 p.m. to formally announce the outcome of the vote to Greece’s incoming Head of state. (www.ekathimerini.com)



The new President of the Greek state, Katerina
Sakellariopoulou

(Photo source: www.adjustice.gr)

- January 23rd, the EU will not agree to a political solution to Libya's factional conflict unless Turkey and Libya abandon a maritime accord they signed in November, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Thursday. Libya's internationally recognized Prime Minister, Fayed al-Sarraj, said this week that his country will face a "*catastrophic situation*" unless foreign powers put pressure on eastern-based Commander Khalifa Haftar to lift a blockade of oilfields that has cut output to almost zero. Sarraj inked an agreement with Turkey in November that seeks to create an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from Turkey's southern Mediterranean shore to Libya's northeast coast. It carves out a slanting sea corridor, potentially clearing the way for oil and gas exploration in the area. Greece, which is at odds with Turkey over decades-old issues ranging from mineral rights in the Aegean Sea to ethnically-split Cyprus, says the accord is void and violates the international law of the sea. Athens sees it as a cynical grab designed to scupper the development of East Mediterranean gas and destabilize rivals. "*I have made it very clear to everyone concerned that there is not going to be a political solution in Libya to which*

the EU will have to agree, where will agree, unless these agreements are scrapped," Mitsotakis told a conference panel at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland. The EU also opposes Turkey's and Libya's maritime deal. European Council President Charles Michel said this month he told Sarraj that the agreement "*infringes upon the sovereign rights of third states and does not comply with the (United Nations) Law of the Sea.*" "*We all know that this agreement was signed in exchange for Turkey's military support to the Sarraj Government, and, on top of that, it is an agreement that has not been recognized by the Libyan legislature,"* Mitsotakis said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 24th, the Foreign Ministry hit back on Thursday against what it called Turkey's "*hypocritical*" call for Greece to uphold international law and demilitarize 16 Aegean islands. "*It is at the very least hypocritical for a country that systematically violates the territorial integrity, sovereignty and sovereign rights of nearly all its neighboring countries – a country that threatens to go to war with its neighbor and ally if the latter exercises its legal rights, a country that trumpets its violation of the [United Nations] arms embargo on Libya – to invoke international law,*" the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. The statement concluded by saying that Greece is "*understandably concerned at the fact that the international community's constant urgings to Turkey to respect international law are falling on deaf ears.*" Turkey Defense Minister Hulusi Akar had called on Greece to demilitarize 16 Greek islands near the Turkish coast, which he claimed have a "*non-military status.*" Akar reportedly said that arming 16 out of 23 islands

with non-military status is in violation of agreements in the Aegean Sea. For his part, Greek Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos was more succinct, saying that “*whatever is threatened does not become demilitarized.*” Meanwhile, referring to energy exploration in the East Mediterranean and the EastMed pipeline, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Thursday from Davos that Greece does not “*need Turkey’s permission to do that.*” “*At the end of the day, we have to play by the rules of international law,*” he said during a discussion with Harvard and Stanford history professor Niall Ferguson before an audience at the World Economic Forum in Davos. “*Spoilers should not be rewarded,*” he added. As for Turkey’s maritime border deal with Libya, Mitsotakis said it is “*not just legally but also geographically preposterous*” and has not been recognized by Libya’s Parliament. “*Libya and Turkey do not have any opposing coasts so you cannot sign a delimitation agreement regarding maritime zones,*” he said, adding that the deal disregards the right of Greek islands to an Exclusive Economic Zone. “*There is not going to be a political solution in Libya... unless these agreements are scrapped,*” he added. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Greece enjoys political stability and the election of the President of the state by the Greek Parliament with a wide consensus (261 votes in favor in a 300-seat Parliament) confirmed political maturity and responsibility in favor of state’s interests. The country is getting stronger and more stable by the Prime Minister’s Kyriakos Mitsotakis proposal for the Greek Presidency in a

rather difficult time with several economic, diplomatic and security challenges. Migration could be considered as a major security issue which threatens internal stability of the country. Greece is in the forefront of the migrant flows which continue to arrive in the Greek islands of eastern Aegean Sea. The Government introduces a new law on migration and asylum seekers aiming to control the problem, reduce arrivals and improve migrants living conditions. Local communities strongly react in construction of new facilities claiming that migrants change demographic balance of their place, increase criminality and create conditions of local turbulence. It is not expected that situation will improve in the near future and illegal migration remains an unsolved problem. Tension with Turkey remains in high levels either in rhetoric level or in military provocations. Greece is waiting Turkey’s next move but in the meanwhile it works on securing its sovereign rights and national interests. At the moment the main challenges for Greece is the Turkish – Libyan agreement for delimitation of maritime zones which violates Greek EEZ, the Turkish announcement of hydrocarbon drills in this area, the permanent threat of oil and gas drills by Turkey in the Aegean Sea within Greek EEZ and continental shelf and constant violation of Cypriot sovereign rights. Greece works on diplomatic means to protect its rights but on the other hand it does not hesitate to promote its military capabilities in order to deter further military escalation by Turkey. However, there are several top officials lately who promote the idea of going to Hague International Court of Justice for resolving problems and disputes with Turkey. In a matter of fact it is noticed a change in Greek foreign policy regarding relations with Turkey

since state's officials are speaking more often "for resolving disputes with Turkey" forgetting that Greece has admitted only one bilateral dispute; the continental shelf. There is a sense that Greece is ready to negotiate a package of disputes including delimitation of EEZs, islands demilitarization, continental shelf and other issues which are critical for national security and interests. It is not only a simple coincidence that Turkey also said surprisingly that it is in favor of negotiations "not excluding the Hague." In such a case, finlandization is the only word could describe Greek foreign policy towards Turkey. Situation is critical for Greece since Turkey appears determined to establish its presence in the Aegean Sea and East Mediterranean following an aggressive strategy combining diplomatic and military means. Turkish fighter jets continue to violate Greek airspace overflying islets in the Aegean. It is assessed that it is more possible a narrow incident in an islet (Greece has thousands of them) instead of an excessive war. Besides, the armed conflict will take place in limited time (no more than 72 to 96 hours) engaging a large number of land, naval and air forces and weapons in a rather narrow operational field. It is assessed that Turkey will avoid engaging troops in big Greek islands for several civil-military reasons. Under the current situation in Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea Greece is obliged to strengthen and modernize its Armed Forces operational capability. The Greek Defense Minister, Nikos Panagiotopoulos announced that the country will purchase a squadron of 5th generation fighter jets F-35 (20 to 24 aircrafts) aiming to change balance of air superiority in the Aegean Sea. Currently, Greece focuses on naval units, upgrade of fighter jets, UAVs and follow on

support agreements. Taking into consideration the ongoing provocations in the Aegean Sea and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ and eastern Mediterranean in general, security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey.



KOSOVO: January 20th, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci on Monday invited Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) leader Albin Kurti to form a new Government after that party informed him that it was nominating Kurti for Prime Minister designate. Under the Kosovo Constitution, Thaci has to officially name Kurti as the Prime Minister designate, starting the 15 day period to form a cabinet before Parliament confirms his choices for Ministers. Speaking in a video post on social media, Kurti called the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) to resume negotiations on a coalition agreement. Kurti added that he would meet with representatives of national minorities in the next few days. Vetevendosje won the most votes at last year's parliamentary elections but could not form a Government on its own and started talks with the second-ranked LDK but failed to reach an agreement over the posts of Parliament Speaker and future President of Kosovo as well as the number of Ministries. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 20th, British Embassy in Pristina welcomed Kosovo President Hashim Thaci's appointment of Albin Kurti as candidate for Prime Minister, to form a new Government. "Kosovo voters have waited three and a half months for this moment. Their hope and desire for change, expressed so clearly on October 6th, deserve to be respected," the British Embassy said in a

statement. *“Kosovo’s elected politicians and their parties now need to show courage and creativity in forming a Government that reflects the wishes of the electorate. We call for rapid progress in negotiations, in a spirit of tolerance and partnership,”* the British Embassy said. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 24th, Vjosa Osmani, Deputy Head of the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) announced new meetings with the Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) representatives soon to reach a deal and form new Government. Osmani implied that they are ready to consider meetings with the Vetevendosje even beyond the deadline they set on Sunday. *“We will use these two or three days efficiently. Everything depends what will be discussed in coming 2 or three days to see how we can move forward,”* she told media on Friday. LDK gave Vetevendosje a deadline until Sunday to decide whether they want to accept or reject their proposal on coalition. The two parties are negotiating as the President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci has nominated on Monday the Vetevendosje leader Albin Kurti to form new Government. According to the Constitution Kurti has 15 days to present his cabinet before the Parliament. The LDK and Vetevendosje despite continuous negotiations over the last three months have failed to reach an agreement on sharing of powers in new institutions. Media reported on Friday that the Vetevendosje is willing to reconsider the Speaker’s post claimed by the LDK and dismiss their member Glauk Konjufca who was elected on December 26th, 2019 during constitutive session of Parliament. But the Vetevendosje refuted these reports stating that

Konjufca will not be dismissed. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

A game for hard players is underway in Kosovo regarding formation of a new Government. Winner of the last elections, Vetëvendosje cannot reach an agreement with LDK to form a ruling coalition eventually. In the meanwhile, Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci has put more pressure on Albin Kurti, leader of Vetëvendosje by nominating him as a prime Minister designate. Under the Kosovo Constitution provisions, Kurti has 15 days starting from January 20th, 2020 to present his Government in the Parliament and to get a confidence vote. Under these circumstances, LDK leader, Isa Mustafa is trying to get as much as he can; the Parliament’s Speaker position and the future President one. Although Kurti has rejected Mustafa’s terms it seems that he is willing to compromise taking into consideration the tight timeline. The coming week is critical for Kosovo political stability. If Kurti does not achieve to establish a Government then new elections is very likely to be held. US administration is actively involved in Belgrade – Pristina relations pushing for their rapid normalization. Restoration of Serbia – Kosovo air flights is a significant concession by Belgrade and it is assessed that Kosovo will reply back by abolishing the 100% tariff on Serbian goods. These are the first steps of restarting dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. However, political instability and uncertainty in both countries (Kosovo has almost 4 months without a Government and Serbia is going to hold elections in coming spring) does not support an impressive progress on negotiations. It is possible to see a

couple of “reconnaissance” meetings between the two sides but without tangible results. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish rule of law and modern functional administration in the country. Kosovo unresolved status, political instability, corruption, and organized crime are not encouraging factors for its future within European community. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard.



MOLDOVA: January 20th,

Moldovan Prime Minister Ion Chicu said that the brotherly relations between Romania and Moldova do not depend on the choices made on the banks of Dambovita or Bac river. In an interview for Free Europe, Chicu described relations between Romania and Moldova as good and brotherly. He believes that those who use the subject of Moldovan - Romanian bilateral relations for selfish electoral purposes and strongly try to damage them have no prospects. *“Relations between Romania and Moldova do not depend on the choices made on the banks of Bac or Dambovita. People are much smarter than political palace technologies,”* he said. In this context, the Premier called on all political forces to work for the benefit of people. Recently, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis said he is not convinced that Moldova aims at a European political-economic path, and until then Romania will only be involved in the projects dedicated to citizens. (www.moldpres.md)

- January 21st, the Supreme Security Council (CSS) held its first meeting of 2020. The Council members discussed the action plan, which includes over 60 proposals on behalf of institutions, as well as four important up-to-date subjects – illegal migration, situation at the

Chisinau International Airport, Air Moldova Company and the crime situation in the country. *“Groups of citizens of a certain ethnic minority go to the EU member states, where they ask for political asylum. It is about several hundreds of people at the end of the last year representing a sensitive issue in the relations with our partners,”* President Igor Dodon said after the CSS meeting. The Head of state instructed to consider the mechanisms and discover the organizers of this process, noting that the investigation bodies had opened several criminal files in this respect. The second subject was focused on the Chisinau International Airport and the Avia Invest Company. According to the President, there are three blocks of approaches which would allow the cancellation of the contract with Avia Invest. Among them, there were certain infringements at the signing of the document, which represented reason for closing five criminal files, inefficient contractual conditions, preferential monopoly conditions and failure to implement the investment plan. The third subject deals with the Air Moldova air company, sold by the state on October 1st, 2018. *“The investor had the commitment to pay 1.2 billion lei debts and to come up with investments. We found out that, according to the investor’s reports, debts amounting to one billion lei were paid and 200 million lei remained; yet, in reality, Air Moldova’s debts are of 1.1 billion lei, or the investors has not invested its own money in the company for the time being,”* the President specified. The Head of state stressed that the Supreme Security Council’s decision had been to give time to the investor, which says that it plans some activities, in order to remedy the state of things. Dodon also said that decision-makers would return to this subject at a meeting, during

which a decision is to be taken whether the contract with Air Moldova's investor will be cancelled or not. Dodon warned about the high level of criminality in Moldova and the large number of serious crimes. In this context, the President backed the reform of the institute of district Policeman, with a plan to this effect prepared by the cabinet at present. (www.moldpres.md)

- January 24th, the Moldovan side deliberately creates one new problem after another in order to distract attention from the negotiation agenda, agreed on between all the 5+2 negotiating format participants, to irrelevant questions lying outside the dialogue frame. Such opinion was expressed on Thursday by Transnistrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vitaly Ignatiev during his meeting here with OSCE Special Representative on Transnistria Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting. Ignatiev said that Chisinau's destructive actions, provoking new problems, are but an attempt to ruin dialogue "at all levels of the negotiation process." "First and foremost, it is necessary to fulfill the Berlin+ Package and to fully realize all the earlier accords. So far, we cannot observe whatever progress in the automobile traffic field, or in telecommunications, or in resolving the criminal litigation question. On the contrary, there is a certain regress in them," stated the Chief Negotiator of the unrecognized Transnistrian Moldovan Republic. The OSCE Special Representative was received by Transnistria president Vadim Krasnoselsky, and the interlocutors held a conversation behind closed doors that lasted 3 hours. Krasnoselsky outlined the main questions that need to be settled without a delay namely the closure by Moldova of the Transnistrian enterprises' accounts in

Moldovan banks, lack of progress in resolving the politically-motivated criminal litigations started by Moldova, the telecommunication problem and other. Krasnoselsky asked for the OSCE help to release urgently the Transnistria citizen detained by the Moldovan law enforcement. Mayr-Harting emphasized the priority character of the Transnistrian conflict settlement process for the incumbent Albanian OSCE Presidency and personally for OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Edi Rama. "I regard my personal task to be in avoiding the risk of escalation of the situation and in working to improve the people's life. I am committed to an all-out realization of the Berlin+ Protocols," the Austrian diplomat said. Mayr-Harting also highlighted his interest to hold a 5+2 format meeting in the first half of the current year and to organize a next ordinary Bavaria Conference on confidence-building measures. (www.infotag.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country enjoys relative political stability since the President Igor Dodon achieved to establish his own Government putting aside the pro-western ACUM block. The country definitely follows a pro-Russian orientation, although it declares that it seeks to join the EU. The US and EU watch carefully the country's orientation and already Romania has expressed concerns over Moldova's European path. Due to its strategic geographic position, Moldova has become a field of rivalry between Russia and the US and NATO. The country lacks economic growth, while corruption is in high rates. Russia maintains troops in Transnistria which are considered by pro-western forces as violating Moldovan sovereignty. The frozen conflict of Transnistria is

always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: January 20th, from the time it regained independence, Montenegro has been influenced by various hybrid activities, which were particularly intense just before and during the country's most important political processes, such as the October 2016 parliamentary elections and Montenegro's accession to NATO in June 2017, Defense Minister Predrag Boskovic said. All these activities, he estimated, were predominantly concentrated on the political, information and cyber domains. *“Since the current year is an election year, we are already witnessing an increase in malicious activities, notably misinformation campaigns on various important political, economic and social topics that seek to discredit top political officials and cause public outrage and insecurity, as well as cyber attacks on state administration information systems and media,”* Boskovic said in an interview with the Dnevne Novine daily. He points out that the orchestrated campaign launched by a number of media in the country, region and beyond, which tend to report on the recently adopted Law on Freedom of Religion and Belief and the Legal Status of Religious Communities, aiming at destabilization, supports this development of political and security situation in the country. *“What makes Montenegro specific and sensitive to such strikes in comparison to other countries is that we have some hybrid aggressors in the environment and within our country, embodied in political parties, NGOs, religious communities and individuals who voluntarily or under pressure play the role of the Trojan horse in the social and*

political life of Montenegro,” Boskovic emphasized. Talking about the Law on Freedom of Religion, Boskovic said that Montenegro, as a democratic state, has a constitutional, international legal and historical responsibility to regulate all issues related to freedom of religion by modern law, to the highest international standards. (www.rtcg.me)

- January 24th, Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) Deputy President, Dusko Markovic, said today in Pljevlja that Montenegro *“will never be Serbian”* and that Metropolitan Amfilohije had put himself in the front of anti-Montenegrin opposition. *“That resulted in the protest and the religious procession where Montenegrins could not find their place. I am sure that civil and democratic Montenegro will once again resist to such folklore and destruction,”* Markovic said in DPS session which was held in Pljevlja. Markovic categorically said that religious processions are not religious but political and are aimed against change of power and jeopardizing Montenegro's sovereignty. *“This Serbian propaganda will not shake Montenegro in its resolve to protect the Constitution and preserve state and national interests,”* Markovic said. (www.cdm.me)

- January 24th, Police in Montenegro detained on Friday a well known pro-Russian journalist, Igor Damjanovic, over his conversation on social media with another person who then filed a case against him. But Damjanovic, who writes for the Russian media in the region, claims the Police did not take him into custody over his social media jibes at an account holder called *“Alija Djukic.”* *“The real reason for the Police repression is my political activism, in which the regime is*

hampered by my opposition to Montenegro's membership of NATO and the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion," Damjanovic told news website IN4S. In a conversation of which local media published a portion, Damjanovic asked Djukic whether *"the heroin was bad this morning,"* to which Djukic sarcastically replied *"Yes, the one [received] from you."* In a separate case, also concerning social media comments, police on Thursday arrested Milija Goranovic from Niksic for allegedly insulting the country's Police Chief, Veselin Veljovic. Media reports said Goranovic was fined 500 euro for telling Veljovic *"not to talk rubbish"* below a statement of the Police Director on social media. Police said Goranovic was fined for violating the Law on Public Order and Peace and for verbally insulting Veljovic. Goranovic told the daily Vijesti on January 23rd, 2020 that he did not feel apologetic. *"I was irritated ... I commented on Veljovic's statement that situation in the state was safe ... and did not repent of the comment and I told that to the judge,"* he said. The newest arrests came after the editors of local news websites IN4S and Borba, Gojko Raicevic and Drazen Zivkovic, were detained on January 12th, 2020 on suspicion of causing panic and public disorder in connection with reports of an explosion at the Villa Gorica, a building in Podgorica used by the Government for receptions. On January 5th, 2020 the editor-in-chief of the Fos media website, Andjela Djikanovic was placed in detention for 72 hours for *"causing panic and disorder"* after claiming in an article that the Government might call on security forces in neighboring Kosovo to help quell Serbian Orthodox Church supporters' protests over the new legislation on religion. On January 14th, 2020 the Culture Ministry said that the country had become the target of an organized

"disinformation campaign" since it adopted a new law on religion that has angered the Serbian Orthodox Church and its supporters in Montenegro. The Church, the largest faith group in the country, says the new law could be used to target its assets. But authorities say they are the victims of a coordinated campaign to spread fake news, organized by a number of media outlets in the country and the region that are spreading religious and national hatred and violence. The European Commission has not taken sides over the disputed law on religion but said on January 7th, 2020 that journalists in the country need to be able to work safely and without fear of harassment, political pressure, censorship or persecution. (www.balkaninsight.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Montenegrin authorities promote lately "hybrid warfare hysteria." Top-officials such as the Prime Minister and Ministers keep repeating that Montenegro is under constant hybrid threats. Misinformation, fake news, propaganda, and destabilizing actions are on the forefront of the "hybrid" agenda. There is an atmosphere that the state is under attack. On the other hand, the Government keeps promoting stability and growth aiming to attract more and more investments. Something sounds strange in the whole situation. The fact is that Montenegro is a NATO member state and a candidate country for entering the EU. In other words, it has become a rather integral part of Euro-Atlantic structures. So why such "hysteria?" The President, Milos Djukanovic is accused of authoritarianism, media censorship (January was a month of several arrests of people working on media), and violation of human rights. 2020 is an election year and opposition

strengthens its stance seeking fair and free elections. Under these circumstances “fear” works effectively and influences the voters. Hybrid threats and threats against state’s national security disorientate citizens from real problems and rallies voters around the ruling party. Unless the state authorities have accurate and reliable intelligences on Montenegro’s national security then it is assessed that all this “hybrid hysteria” is in the service of certain political goals. Corruption, smuggling and money laundering are dominated in the country setting significant obstacles and risks for every investor. Besides, such situation has strongly affected progress of accession negotiations with the EU. Montenegro needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Serbian intervention in Montenegrin internal affairs is considered also as a notable problem which needs to be resolved. Serbia refuses to abandon the view that Montenegro is the “natural extension of the country.” This situation was pointed out by the Prime Minister, Dusko Markovic who stated that “Montenegro will never become Serbian.” The country focuses on strengthening its Armed Forces by purchasing modern equipment and reducing the average age of its military personnel (currently 37 years old).



NORTH MACEDONIA: January 20th, as the elections approach, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна

организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) leadership continues to advocate dangerous ideas for abolishing the “Prespa” Agreement the former Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev claimed. “VMRO-DPMNE wants to abolish the agreement that bring us to NATO and step up negotiations with the European Union,” Zaev said at today's press conference, the first since his resignation as Prime Minister and the establishment of a technical Government. According to him VMRO-DPMNE would not reach to get the two-thirds majority, but it was his duty to outline what the opposition party advocates, which would indicate new damages to the country. “Recently, in October 2019, Hristijan Mickoski told the Serbian media that if his party gets a two-thirds majority, it would consider the possibility of withdrawing from the agreement [“Prespa” agreement],” Zaev said. The leader of Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) said lifting of the “Prespa” Agreement would mean new divisions and new blockades, as well as the loss of NATO membership. “We would return to FYROM, the name by which we were called at the expense of the constitutional name, and that would mean losing NATO membership and the EU perspective. It will surely weaken or lose support of our friends; there will be new blockades from Greece, new internal instability and risks of partition. VMRO-DPMNE has never managed to negotiate a solution with Greece that would recognize simultaneously the ethnic identity of the Macedonians, the Macedonian language and preserve the codes MK and MKD,” Zaev said. According to him, cancellation of the “Prespa” agreement is a threat to both internal and regional security, and called

on the VMRO-DPMNE leadership to cease manipulative statements on cancellation, modification or annulment of the agreement. (www.nezavisen.mk)

- January 21st, a British training team of the Duke of Lancaster's Second Battalion is at the "Jane Sandanski" base in Shtip where it will be training with 30 potential officers of the First Light Infantry Unit. At the Army base, which became part of NATO' structure, there was an inspection by the Ministry of Defense Radmila Shekjerinska and her NATO adviser, the British Brigadier General Robert Hugh Lloyd-Jones. Transformation of North Macedonia's Army according to NATO standards due to the coming membership is starting with the formation of the First Light Infantry Unit in Shtip, which is assisted by the British Armed Forces. The United Kingdom is awaiting to greet North Macedonia as NATO's 30 member country. The Light Infantry Unit will be better equipped, better trained and will have better resources than any other conventional unit. It will be organized and trained according to NATO standards and will be a basis for the Army's contribution to NATO, General Jones said, who announced further assistance with training and advising in the process of transforming the North Macedonia's Army. One part of the team is located in Shtip while the other is in Krivolak military base. Employees at the Army, who have three year contracts, as was announced by the Defense Minister, will receive 7.000 denars (114 euro) monthly as salary supplement for accommodation. With the salary raise and this salary supplement each soldier, who used to receive 20.000 denars (325 euro) will now receive 30.000 denars (488 euro) monthly. (www.meta.mk)

- January 26th, Prime Minister Oliver Spasovski called on today the opposition Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) to show the minimum political consensus and to vote for the Defense Law before the dissolution of Parliament on February 12th, 2020. According to Spasovski, if VMRO-DPMNE will not vote for the law on defense, it will confirm that the party interests are the first priority. "So far I have not heard any argument why the defense law should not be passed. There are no amendments except the name of the Army. I expect rationality to prevail eventually," Spasovski said. The technical Government's Prime Minister expressed his satisfaction for the country being just one step before entering NATO. (www.nezavisen.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

As long as elections are coming closer political confrontation between SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE is getting tougher. As it was expected the "Prespa" agreement is in the forefront of the debate. VMRO-DPMNE leader Hristijan Mickoski claimed that if he will get a 2/3 parliamentary majority he will seek to cancel the agreement. It is a tricky statement since it is estimated that it almost impossible for his party to elect 80 MPs in the 120-seat Parliament. It is rather a populist statement which is addressed to the nationalist group of voters. Failure of opening accession negotiations with the EU, scandals and corruption cases, is expected to be also in the main issues of political debate. The EU monitors

the pre-election process and, as the French Ambassador to Skopje claimed, successful elections will be decisive for North Macedonia's opening of accession negotiations. At the moment, North Macedonia has political uncertainty and next day of election it needs a strong Government to proceed with necessary reforms and securing opening of accession negotiations with the EU within 2020. The country should focus on reforms regarding justice, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, administration, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process.



ROMANIA: January 20th, while the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) is closing ranks to secure as much endorsement as they can for the announced censure motion, some voices in the party say that they actually do not intend to return to power. According to the PSD's interim Chairman Marcel Ciolacu, 115 signatures have been raised so far for the censure motion after the Government takes responsibility on electing Mayors in two rounds. PSD MP Olguta Vasilescu stated on Monday that her party will negotiate with every party to secure endorsement at the vote. *"All our colleagues have voted for the motion, UDMR will support us,"* she said, adding that they are negotiating *"with anyone."* *"All those who want to vote the censure motion are welcome. I hope there will be also MPs outside PSD and UDMR,"* Vasilescu said. On the other hand, interim Secretary General Paul Stanescu argues that PSD should not return to power in the upcoming period. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- January 22nd, The National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) will

nominate Alina Gorghiu for the leadership of the Senate, after the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) ruled the election of current Head Teodor Melescanu was unconstitutional, said on Wednesday Prime Minister Ludovic Orban. The Premier added that Gorghiu had already been voted in the PNL Political Bureau to run for this position. The CCR on Wednesday has ruled that the election of Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE) Senator Teodor Melescanu for the Presidency of the Romanian Upper House of Parliament was unconstitutional. On September 10th, 2019 Teodor Melescanu was elected in a plenary sitting as President of the Senate with 73 votes while Alina Gorghiu of the PNL got only 59 votes. On September 11th, 2019 the ALDE leader Calin Popescu-Tariceanu announced that several MPs of the opposition had signed a notification to the CCR regarding the way Melescanu had been elected at the helm of the Senate, by support of the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) at the time. (www.nineoclock.ro)

- January 24th, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stresses *"the need for a proper understanding of history"* and asked for clarifications regarding the recent statements made by the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who said that *"North Bukovina was occupied by the Romanians."* In this regards, says the Ministry release, Secretary of State Dan Neculaescu had on Thursday a discussion with the Ambassador of Ukraine in Bucharest, Oleksandr Bankov. *"The Romanian side requested clarifications regarding the references to Romania that have appeared in the recent public discourse of the President of Ukraine, expressing*

its surprise at them and emphasizing the need for a proper understanding of history,” the Ministry document reads. During the same meeting, the Romanian side *“reiterated the special importance it gives to ensuring the rights of people belonging to the Romanian minority in Ukraine, in accordance with the international rules and standards, including the full consideration of the Venice Commission recommendations.”* Senior official Neculaescu expressed his concern regarding the effects that the adoption, on January 16th, 2020 of the new Law of secondary education might have upon the right to education in their mother tongue of the Romanian minority’s members, as well as the Romanian side’s interest for the intensification of the dialogue with the Ukrainian side, not only within the bilateral joint Committee on the national minorities but also between the Ukrainian authorities and the Romanian minority in Ukraine so as to respond to their concerns. On Wednesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for solidarity on his fellow nationals in a speech on Ukraine’s Unity Day in which, among other things, he maintains that *“North Bukovina was occupied by the Romanians,”* according to the address in English posted on the website of the Ukrainian Presidency, Agerpres informs. Bankov affirmed on social media that Zelensky’s statement, that Romania had occupied North Bukovina, was incorrectly translated from Ukrainian into English on the official website of the He added that mistakes in the English translation of the presidential speech published online have already been corrected. (www.nineoclock.ro)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Opposition PSD prepares to file a censure motion against the PNL’s Government which may achieve its goal to topple it. However, this no-confidence motion works in favor of PNL’s political plans which seek to push the country towards early parliamentary elections. PNL leaders decided to call for early elections due to favorable conditions for their party to win. PSD is in a transition process and even its Chairman is an interim one. The fact is that Romania needs early elections in order a strong Government with new mandate to come in power ensuring political stability of the country. Besides a strong Government will forward reforms regarding fight against corruption and modernizing public administration. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries and the Alliance perceiving it as a threat against its national security. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: January 20th, officials from Serbia and Kosovo on Monday signed an agreement which will allow the restoration of Belgrade - Pristina flights after a break of more than 20 years. A letter of intent was signed in the US Embassy in Berlin in the presence of Ambassador Richard Grenell and US National Security Advisor Robert O’ Brien. LUFTHANSA’s EUROWINGS company will fly between Belgrade and Pristina once Serbia and Kosovo remove all obstacles. Serbian Government Office for Kosovo Chief Marko Djuric told the Serbian state TV on Monday that

he expects air traffic between Belgrade and Pristina to resume after a break of 20 years. He said that flights between the Serbian capital and Pristina could resume once the 100% tariffs on Serbian goods imposed by the Kosovo authorities are revoked and the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue continues. He recalled that Belgrade and Pristina are linked by 12 bus lines a day. Djuric said that official Belgrade would inform UNMIK and KFOR about the possible resumption of flights because they are in charge of Kosovo air space under UN Security Council Resolution 1244. Eset Berisha, CEO of the Kosovo Civil Aviation Authority said at the ceremony in the US Embassy that the letter of intent *“puts the two civil aviation authorities into contact as equal partners,”* adding that this is the first step to full normalization of Kosovo's airspace. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 24th, the Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic met with US President Donald Trump's Special Envoy for the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue, Richard Grenell. Grenell, who arrived in Belgrade from Pristina, said that Pristina must lift taxes and would ask Belgrade to suspend its campaign of de-recognition of Kosovo's independence. Media in Serbia say that the US wants an expedited settlement of the Kosovo issue, but also finalizing the two-party agreement at a new international conference that would be in the form of a *“new Dayton.”* According to the Serbian Telegraph, there is no timetable and precise date for reaching a new agreement, such as the one that ended the conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, concluded in Dayton, but Grenell's determination is that the job entrusted to him by Trump should be finished as soon as possible. The newspaper claims that the US agreement will

include abolition of Pristina taxes, continuation of negotiations at an accelerated pace, border crossing, annexation of northern Kosovo to Serbia proper, US investments in the region, especially to northern Kosovo, which would belong to Serbia, arrival of US companies, investment in travel infrastructure, boosting trade between Belgrade and Pristina and accelerating EU integration process. *“This is not a matter that is resolved within a few days, but it is a topic that the current American leader wants to address in a way that would secure a lasting agreement with a compromise between the two sides,”* the Serbian Telegraph quoted a statement by an unnamed source. As the source adds, in addition to the political segment, which he claims does not rule out the partitioning of the province *“by which the north of Kosovo would be annexed to Serbia,”* Grenell's plan also includes an economic package. The source of Srpski Telegraf states that Grenell insists on this economic moment, because he is convinced that this is a way to connect the region as soon as possible, to establish cooperation that would facilitate the further path. Serbian Chamber of Commerce President Marko Cadez told the newspaper that precisely the new economic opportunities and foreign investment *“in Kosovo and Serbia”* could make it easier to reach a final agreement in dialogue and normalization of relations. *“The whole Kosovo problem can come closer to normalizing, above all the relations between Serbs and Albanians, through the economic interest that we have in common. Grenell really puts the economy at the forefront and starts from what benefits it, first of all, to the economy, because businessmen always consider mutual interest,”* Cadez explains. At the same time, he added, it is important that Washington has a focus here *“because we have not been on*

the radar for a long time, and it is important that there is someone who is a strong partner and who can be the EU's guarantor for further developments.” (www.b92.net)

- January 25th, it is in the US' best interest to help Serbia achieve full membership of the EU, which is the best way to ensure the stability in the Western Balkans, US Ambassador to Belgrade Anthony Godfrey told FoNet, adding he was disappointed with the decision of some opposition parties to boycott the upcoming elections. He explained that the US President Donald Trump sent him to Serbia to improve relations between the two countries and do what he can to increase stability in the region, noting that he is happy to be here and honored to have been nominated. He thinks that free access to media should be promoted before the next election and he is working together with the EU, the OSCE and the Serbian Government towards this direction. Godfrey does not think the media environment is satisfactory for everyone to understand what is happening in the country during the election campaign. Asked about the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue, he said he hopes it would resume soon. The Ambassador noted that it was clear at this point that almost all opposition in Serbia would boycott the election, adding that he was disappointed with this decision. “*We are disappointed with the decision of the opposition parties to boycott the elections. We think it is important for the people of Serbia to be able to make their own decisions,*” Godfrey said. The Ambassador said depriving the people of their right to “*make their own decisions does not contribute to Serbia's democratic development.*” (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Serbian elections are getting closer (end of April or beginning of May) but opposition announced that it will boycott them. A disappointing decision which undermines political stability of the country. Of course the Government carries the burden and responsibility to improve electoral procedure, strengthen media freedom and ensure free and fair elections but it is assessed that from the very first moment the opposition did not actually seek to join the elections. In other words, opposition failed to offer tangible solutions to political deadlock; on the contrary it became part of the problem. Serbia needs political stability since it has a lot of diplomatic, security and economic challenges ahead. First of all, the Kosovo case. A major development occurred last week. Serbia and Kosovo signed an agreement on restoration of Pristina – Belgrade flights after a break of more than 20 years. Although it sounds as rather economic or trade agreement it is of high political importance. Actually Serbia admits that Kosovo has its own FIR and Serbian pilots will submit their flight drafts. It is assessed that Serbia made this concession under the US pressure and soon Kosovo will follow by lifting the 100% taxes on Serbian goods. It is a strong sign that dialogue will restart soon. However, expectations should be in low level since elections will block the negotiation process. The US administration has strongly be involved in Serbia – Kosovo dispute pushing for a quick resolution and normalization of bilateral relations. The US President's Special Envoy for the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue, Richard Grenell visited Belgrade and Pristina promising a very attractive package including funds, direct American investments and acceleration of EU accession

process. It is difficult to reject such a package. Restoration of flights is a US administration success. Serbia is engaged in several Balkan regions such as Bosnia, Montenegro and Croatia where a significant Serb population is located. Belgrade never gave up the idea that these territories are the natural extension of its territory and keeps intervening in internal affairs of these states. The country has developed very close relations with Russia, especially in the fields of defense. Russia keeps supplying Serbia with weapons, while both countries conduct military exercises. In other words, Serbia is trying to balance between the west, namely the EU and the US on one side and Russia on the other. The EU has raised serious concerns over Serbia's effectiveness on independence and accountability of the judiciary, freedom of expression, prevention of corruption and the fight against organized crime. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.



SLOVENIA: January 20th, the option of a Government reshuffle arising after Karl Erjavec announced his resignation as Defense Minister in the wake of losing the vote for the presidency of the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) was ruled out as the new DeSUS leader, Aleksandra Pivec, met Prime Minister Marjan Sarec. In a written statement issued after the meeting, Sarec's Office said that the Prime Minister and Pivec had an in-depth discussion, agreeing on “continued

constructive and proactive cooperation in the Government.” (www.sta.si)

- January 21st, Slovenia's defense budget will finally reach 2% of GDP by 2035, according to a white paper released online by the Defense Ministry. The document also shows plans for the Armed Forces to gradually grow by more than 1,500 soldiers, reaching 8,000 by 2035. The white paper also implies that unless the Armed Forces manage to attract more members, Slovenia will have to think about reintroducing obligatory military duty in the future. The public presentation of the white paper on defense at the National Council raised a number of concerns, above all about plans to increase the number of soldiers and what some believe is a lack of focus on technological development. Several participants wondered how Slovenia was to reach the goal of an 8,000-strong professional military force and a 2000-strong standing reserve by 2035, up from 6,400 and 700, respectively. Officials argued the goal was feasible without a military draft. (www.sta.si)

- January 24th, the EU's Court of Justice said it would announce on January 31st, 2020 whether it will admit Slovenia's suit against Croatia over the latter's failure to implement the 2017 border arbitration award. In early December 2019, the Court's Advocate General Priit Pikamae proposed to the Court to rule the case inadmissible, which came as a surprise to many in Slovenia. However, while many agreed the opinion did not bode well for the fate of the procedure, the opinion does not prejudge the Court's final decision on admissibility. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Marjan Sarec's minority Government continues to enjoy support in the Parliament. Change of leadership in ruling coalition partner DeSUS led in Defense Minister Karl Erjavec's resignation since he lost party leadership by Aleksandra Pivec. It was officially announced that there will be no Government's reshuffle confirming the ruling coalition's coherence and stability. The possibility of snap elections is rather unlikely, however it is not certain what it will happen since the Government bases its viability on opposition support. Slovenia – Croatia relations may be tested in coming period due to the latter's effort to join the Schengen Zone. Slovenia appears determined to play the "Schengen Zone card" in order to push Croatia to implement the ruling arbitration regarding the Piran Bay dispute, but it is not sure if it will insist until the end of the process. It might Slovenia be isolated by the other member states; it is not an easy way to veto in EU institutions. The EU Court of Justice said that it will announce on January 31st, 2020 if it will admit Slovenia's suit against Croatia over the latter's failure to implement the 2017 border arbitration award. It is assessed that it will reject it since there is an EU general stance to abstain from any intervention in this issue, either in political level, or in legal procedure. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. Announcement of White Book on Defense last week presented a rather

ambitious program of improving operational capabilities of the Armed Forces. It foresees an 8,000-strong professional military force and a 2000-strong standing reserve by 2035, up from 6,400 and 700, respectively. Slovenia's defense budget will finally reach 2% of GDP (a NATO requirement) by 2035.



TURKEY: January 21st, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said that Somalia invited Turkey to explore for oil in its waters, private national broadcaster NTV reported. Turkey has been a significant source of aid to Somalia following a famine in 2011. Turkish engineers have helped to build infrastructure in Somalia, businesses have invested in the country and Turkish officers have trained Somali soldiers as part of efforts to build up the country's Army. Speaking to reporters on Monday, on his flight back from a Libya summit in Berlin, Erdogan said Turkey would take steps in line with the Somali invitation, but did not elaborate further. "There is an offer from Somalia. They are saying 'There is oil in our seas. You are carrying out these operations with Libya, but you can also do them here.' This is very important for us," Erdogan was cited as saying by NTV. "Therefore, there will be steps for taking operations there," he added. In late December 2019, a group of Turkish engineers was among those hit in a blast at a checkpoint in Mogadishu that killed at least 90 people. Last weekend, a car bombing wounded some 15 people, including Turkish contractors, in Afgoye. Erdogan recently said Turkey's seismic exploration vessel "Oruc Reis" would be deployed to explore for oil and gas off Libya. Other similar Turkish vessels are

engaged in the same activity off Cyprus. (www.aljazeera.com)

- January 23rd, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar criticized Greece for violating international law and agreements by arming 16 demilitarized islands. Akar noted that Greece has unlawfully armed 16 out of 23 Aegean islands, completely disregarding several international agreements. *“We expect Greece to abide by international law and agreements and act in line with good neighborly relations,”* Akar said. Akar spoke during a visit to Turkish defense contractor ROKETSAN late Wednesday. He was accompanied by Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, General Yasar Guler, Army Commander General Umit Dundar and Navy Commander Admiral Adnan Ozbal. Akar noted that the issue of Cyprus is a matter of national concern for Turkey and that the country will continue to strive to protect the rights of Turkish Cypriots. *“We have done whatever was necessary (in Cyprus) until today and will continue to do so,”* he said, adding that no projects in the Eastern Mediterranean or Cyprus will be viable if they do not include Turkey. Starting from the Treaty of London in 1913, the militarization of Eastern Aegean Islands was restricted and their demilitarized status was confirmed in the Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923. The 1947 Treaty of Paris, which ceded the Dodecanese from Italy to Greece, also confirmed the demilitarized status. However, Greece argues that the 1936 Montreux Convention on Turkish Straits should be applied regarding the issue, while Ankara says Greece's obligation to disarm the islands remains unchanged under the Montreux Convention as well since there is no provision that is different from the Treaty of Lausanne on the issue. The re-

arming of the demilitarized Aegean islands has always been a hot debate between the two countries, especially after the 1960s when relations between Ankara and Athens turned sour over the Cyprus question and extended Greek claims over Aegean airspace and territorial waters. Turkey's first reaction to Greece's arming of the islands in the Aegean was a diplomatic note given to Athens on June 29th, 1964. He noted that Turkey's efforts and military progress have enabled the country to become a leader in the international community. Regarding the agreement with Libya, Akar said the agreement has been on the agenda for almost a decade and is not new. He criticized Greece for seeking to have the final say on everything in the region. *“Greece wants everything to happen in its way but there are rules, regulations and international law. Not everything will happen as it wishes,”* Akar said. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 24th, Turkish military personnel being sent to Libya are supporting and training forces of the internationally recognized Government of Fayez al-Sarraj, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said. Speaking in Istanbul on Friday after talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Erdogan also said countries which attended a Libya summit in Berlin on Sunday should not favor al-Sarraj's opponent, Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar, after he left the meeting without signing a ceasefire deal. Earlier on Friday, the Turkish President warned of chaos in Libya unless peace is quickly established, as he hosted Merkel. The two leaders inaugurated a new Turkish-German University in Istanbul, where Erdogan expressed his concerns about the Libyan conflict. *“If calm is not established as soon as possible, the atmosphere of chaos in*

Libya will affect the entire Mediterranean basin,” he said in a speech. He called for greater pressure on renegade Haftar, who is waging an offensive against the UN-recognized Government in Tripoli, which is supported by Turkey. Missile attacks this week on Tripoli's Mitiga airport, blamed on Haftar's forces, show “*who is in favor of peace and who is in favor of bloodshed and tears,*” Erdogan said. “*We hope the international community will not make the mistakes it made in Syria,*” he said. Haftar's forces, which are aligned with an eastern-based rival administration and control the east and much of southern Libya, receive support from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt. In addition to the conflict in Libya, talks between Erdogan and Merkel were expected to also focus on the future of a migration deal between Turkey and the EU that helped decrease refugee flows to Europe. The number of refugees and migrants entering Europe from Turkey rose significantly last year as people fleeing conflict in Syria and Afghanistan arrived in Greece, leading to deteriorating conditions in overcrowded camps on the eastern Aegean islands. Spearheaded by Germany, the EU agreed in 2016 to grant Turkey up to 6.6 billion euro in Syrian refugee aid money and other incentives to persuade the Government in Ankara to stop migrants departing for Greece. Erdogan frequently accuses the EU of not fulfilling its side of the deal and has in the past threatened to “*open the gates*” for refugees and migrants to head to Europe. He says his country cannot be expected to shoulder the burden of hosting more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees and wants European support to settle some of them in a so-called “*safe zone*” in northern Syria. European nations are reluctant to back such a proposal. The timing of Merkel's visit also comes amid rising tensions

with the EU over Turkey's attempts to drill for natural gas in waters in the eastern Mediterranean where EU-member Cyprus says it has exclusive economic rights. Cyprus last week denounced Turkey as a “*pirate*” state that flouts international law. Turkey insists it is protecting its rights and interests, and those of breakaway Turkish Cypriots, to the region's energy resources. It says it is carrying out drilling activities as part of an agreement with the Turkish Cypriots. (www.aljazeera.com)



Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan meets German Chancellor, Angela Merkel
(Photo source: www.tccb.gov.tr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ ■ :

On January 25th, 2020 a devastating earthquake rocked eastern province of Elazig killing at least 22 people and injuring more than 1,000. The Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) coordinates rescue and humanitarian operation to address the crisis. Turkey exercises a multilateral, multifaceted, dynamic external policy ensuring its national interests. Enjoying a pivotal geographic location is engaged in several regional challenges. Despite that, enjoys special relationship with great powers such as the US and Russia. The Preseident Recep Tayyip Erdogan made clear publically last week that

“Turkish security is beyond its borders.” This statement summarizes the security doctrine of Turkey; Turkey will be engaged in regional challenges, conflicts and cooperation to ensure its security. Turkish engagement in Syria, Libya, Cyprus is explained by this doctrine. The country combines both diplomatic means and “hard” power aiming to achieve its goals. Turkey achieved so far to establish a safe zone within Syria eliminating the Kurdish threat. Moreover, it launches several military operations in Southeast Turkey and Eastern Iraq against PKK. It has conducted hydrocarbon drills in Mediterranean Sea within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and presents its aeronautical power against Greece and Cyprus questioning their sovereign rights. Finally, it sends troops in Libya aiming to have a “say” in North Africa developments. Of course it is a NATO member and enjoys a special relationship with Russia. Without any question, Turkey has the characteristics of a regional superpower and it tries to act like one. It is assessed that its relations with the US will never reach a “zero point: since Turkey is an integral and critical part of the western security architecture. Under these circumstances an armed conflict or a “hot” incident could not be excluded in the Aegean Sea, the Cypriot territorial waters or southeast of Crete. Definitely Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in the region and is expected to react violently if balance of power is jeopardized. Turkey has been outraged by the Cypriot, Egyptian, Greek and Israeli cooperation in the fields of energy and defense. It declares that any possible project in the Eastern Mediterranean should include Turkey or it will not be sustainable. The Turkish – Libyan agreement on delimitation of maritime zones was a major step

which gives to Turkey a central role in Eastern Mediterranean cutting the Greek, Cypriot and Egyptian EEZs in the middle. Tension will break out when Turkey will try to exercise its rights in the declared EEZ. Moreover, it is assessed that Turkey works intensively to divide the quadrilateral cooperation of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece and Israel by setting bilateral delimitation of EEZs with Egypt (and Israel as a second thought). The country continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will set the base to become a regional military super power.


www.hermesresearch.eu


email: info@hermesresearch.eu


Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas

NOTE


 Stable situation. No security risk.

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.

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

 Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. Violent incidents or armed

violence in specific regions. Ongoing tension or crisis. High security risk.

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