

*JANUARY 22 - 28, 2018 – ISSUE 10*



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

## ***SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE***

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



***SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE***

***PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE TO THOSE WHO SHAPE THE FUTURE***

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

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

### **“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 © 2018

“HERMES” Institute for Foreign Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy

All rights reserved





**ALBANIA:** January 25<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister Edi Rama met with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic in Davos during the World Economic Forum. Rama stated that he wish both countries to enter the EU at the same time underlying *“with the precondition that Serbia recognizes Kosovo.”* According to the Albanian Prime Minister *“Serbia precedes in the accession negotiation talks due to the fact that it is already negotiating but I hope that Albania will start negotiations this year.”* Moreover the two leaders discussed on bilateral and regional cooperation and the future of the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue after Oliver Ivanovic’s assassination. ([www.albaniannews.com](http://www.albaniannews.com), [www.gazetadita.al](http://www.gazetadita.al))

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister Edi Rama met with his Greek counterpart Alexis Tsipras in the framework of the international Economic Forum in Davos. Rama and Tsipras discussed about the progress have been achieved in bilateral relations between the two countries. According to media sources Albania and Greece are ready to reach a strategic agreement resolving all the critical issues which burden relations of the two states allowing Albania to accelerate its accession talks with the EU. During the meeting they was discussed the remaining issues which have not been resolved yet. Situation of the Greek minority in Albania was also in the agenda of talks. Rama invited Tsipras to visit officially Albania; an invitation which was accepted by the Greek prime Minister. ([www.top-channel.tv](http://www.top-channel.tv), [www.gazetadita.al](http://www.gazetadita.al))

- January 27<sup>th</sup>, the united Albanian opposition staged a massive protest in front of the Prime Minister’s Office, accusing him of having ties with crime. Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë - PD) leader, Lulzim

Basha, and the leader of the Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI), Monika Kryemadhi have called the Prime Minister Edi Rama to leave. Basha declared the Albanian people have only one purpose, refusing the illegal government of Edi Rama; *“On your behalf and on behalf of the opposition, we demand Edi Rama and his illegal government to leave. We need to create an anti-mafia government that fights crime and advances with the judiciary reform based on the Constitution of Albania so that we can have free and fair elections. A new relation between political forces and free citizens is being established today.”* Kryemadhi declared that *“for first time in the past 27 years, Albania has a politician who is alone, surrounded by his puppets, who cannot prolong his life for a single minute.”* She apologized to Albanian people *“We apologize for our mistake, giving a chance to this man who has been playing with the people of Albania for the past 20 years. Let’s protest not only in Tirana but throughout Albania,”* adding *“Our Prime Minister of drugs put water meters to wells that the Albanian people had dug on their own because there was no government there to bring them aqueducts. But he didn’t put meters to the oil wells that stole the blood and sweat of Albanian oil workers. He hates his own country, his own family. He doesn’t love our flag and is playing with it. This man must leave the soonest possible.”* According to former leader of PD and former Prime Minister Sali Berisha more than 500,000 people protested against the *“most corrupted government of Albania.”* The Interior Ministry has deployed around 1,300 police officers and National Guard staff in order to keep the situation under control but protest was peaceful without major incidents. ([www.top-channel.tv](http://www.top-channel.tv), [www.albaniannews.com](http://www.albaniannews.com), [www.gazetadita.al](http://www.gazetadita.al))



Albanian people protest  
(Photo source: [www.pd.al](http://www.pd.al))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*The January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018 protest against the Government although it was a massive reaction of Albanian people does not have political cost for Edi Rama's power. People expressed their dissatisfaction against the Government's policy but it is estimated that opposition does not have the political power and capability to accelerate possible political developments namely topple of the Government and early elections. The ongoing normalization of Albanian – Greek relations brings closer Albania towards the beginning of negotiation talks for accession in the EU Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.*



## BOSNIA &

**HERZEGOVINA:** January 24<sup>th</sup>, the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H), Bruce Berton, stated that from the moment the issue of the name of the language for Bosniak children first appeared in Republika Srpska (RS), the Mission warned that it was discrimination. *“Our position is clear from the very beginning - the language of the Bosniak people is Bosnian. The B&H Constitutional Court has confirmed this, stating that the constituent*

*peoples have the right to call their language the way they want it,”* Berton clearly said. In his statement he noted that education should not be politicized, and authorities and parents throughout B&H should act in the best interests of children. *“The mission urges RS authorities to resolve the issue as soon as possible by recognizing the Bosnian language, as the authorities have done for many years,”* concluded Ambassador Berton. Bosniak students in the RS, instead of the Bosnian language, are introduced into the pupil book *“language of Bosniak people.”* Parents' struggle for their rights has been going on for several years now, and the latest example is Bosniak students who do not attend classes at the regional Sveti Sava primary school in Liplje near Zvornik. Their parents are determined not to go to school until the issue of the mother tongue is resolved, or until the Bosnian language begins to enroll in the pupil book, not the *“Language of Bosniak people.”* The administration of the school continues to claim that they respect the RS Constitution. The Ministry of Education and Culture stated that the Constitutional Court of B&H has determined that the language of the Bosniak people is the language of B&H in accordance with the B&H Constitution. ([www.fena.ba](http://www.fena.ba), [www.klix.ba](http://www.klix.ba))

January 24<sup>th</sup>, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted the Resolution on B&H in the proposed form in Strasbourg. The resolution was adopted with 496 votes in favor, 132 against and 67 abstentions. On the one hand, this document welcomes some of the breakthroughs, such as the Reform Agenda agreement, the organization of the population censuses, and the application for membership in the European Union, and, on the other hand, is concerned about the lack of results related to the implementation of the War Crimes Processing

Strategy and the completion of the Missing Process. In the resolution, European parliamentarians welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the Reform Program for the period from 2015 to 2018, and the determination of B&H to continue with institutional and socio-economic reforms. The Resolution urges political actors to adopt amendments to the Constitution and the Election Law no later than six months before the general elections. The decision of the Constitutional Court on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 on the composition of the House of People of the Parliament of the Federal B&H (FB&H) must be urgently carried out before the next general elections. The Assembly appeals to the authorities of both entities to adopt amendments to its constitutions; *“It is highly regrettable that the Constitution of Republika Srpska still provides for the death penalty and that the Federation’s Constitution still contains provisions related to an Ombudsman institution that was abolished in 2008.”* In four cantons of the FB&H, amendments should be made in order to guarantee Constitution for Serbs living in them. The Assembly regrets that the complicated decision-making processes in the State Parliament significantly slow down the processes of legislative reforms. The resentment is also due to the domination of nationalist rhetoric, especially before the elections. There must be zero tolerance for hate speech or the celebration of war criminals. It was emphasized that Bosnia and Herzegovina would not be a successful candidate for membership in the European Union until appropriate institutional conditions were established and an invitation was made to political leaders to work on introducing necessary changes, including the reform of electoral law, taking into account the principles outlined in previous resolutions, such as the principles of federalism, decentralization and

legitimate representation. The resolution expresses regret over the non-implementation of a large number of decisions of the Constitutional Court, and the importance of the recent Constitutional Court decision on the principle of constitutionality and equality of the three constituent peoples to choose their legitimate political representatives on the basis of justified and proportionate representation in the House of People of the Parliament of the FBiH. It is regrettable that the third election cycle for the citizens of Mostar denied their democratic right to choose their local representatives and urges the swift implementation of the Constitutional Court judgment on Mostar by amending the electoral legislation and statute of the City of Mostar and strongly condemning the unacceptable violence that took place during the elections in Stolac and called on the authorities to resolve the situation respecting the rule of law. Finally the Council of Europe expresses its concerns about the cases of political pressure on journalists, and an invitation was sent to the competent authorities to ensure media pluralism and broadcasting of programs in all official languages of B&H. ([www.klix.ba](http://www.klix.ba), [www.assembly.coe.int](http://www.assembly.coe.int))

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, delegates of the House of People of the Parliamentary Assembly of B&H adopted at today's session in Sarajevo a draft law on the budget of institutions and international obligations of B&H for 2018 in the first reading, which amounts to almost two billion KM (1 billion Euros approximately). This important financial document of the state in both readings was previously adopted by the FBiH House of Representatives, and in this year's budget for servicing external debt, there are 1,004,062,329 KM (513 million Euros approximately). During the debate on the budget, the Croat delegation in

the House of People Martin Raguz (Croatian Democratic Union - HDZ1990) said that only 472,000 KM were provided for the Fund for Returns, and with that money it is possible to restore three houses. As one of the founders of that fund, he warned that it is simply an illusion that the state was concerned about this important issue. (www.klix.ba)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Although budget 2018 law finally adopted by the FB&H Parliament it is demonstrated the complexity and narrow effectiveness of state's institutions. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. RS rhetoric for greater autonomy remains active. Security situation stable; no major threats.*



### **BULGARIA:** January 22<sup>nd</sup>,

Bulgaria holding the presidency of the Council of the EU, promotes an initiative for rapprochement between the EU and Turkey. More specifically Bulgaria considers of a summit between them in June 2018 before the EU summit; "A summit between the EU and Turkey in June ahead of the EU summit is under consideration," Farouk Kaymakci, Turkey's Permanent Representative to the EU said. However reactions occurred when the Bulgarian Ambassador to Austria Ivan Sirakov stated said "Stopping the talks [with Turkey] is not in the EU's interest but Turkey must be open and honest." According to Sirakov the EU integration of the Western Balkan countries will not be completed without Turkey's accession. Bulgarian Ambassador said "The Western Balkans are very important for the

*security and wellbeing of Europe. We need Turkey for this process."* According to media reports Sirakov's statements put Bulgaria against the EU current trend regarding Turkey. EU leaders are expected to meet on June 28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and enlarging the Union will be one of the main items on the agenda. Senior officials and Ministers from candidate countries will meet in Bulgaria in the context of its six-month rotating presidency. Bulgaria's Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zakharieva has expressed hope that relations between Turkey and the EU will improve; "Neither the successful protection of the EU's external borders nor the fight against terrorism can be succeeded without a close partnership with Turkey," she said. (www.novinite.com)

January 23<sup>rd</sup>, dialogue between the EU member states and Turkey must be normalized in the context of understanding and prudent decisions, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borissov and Turkish Ambassador in Sofia Hasan Ulusoy agreed in talks. During the talks, Ulusoy congratulated Borissov on Bulgaria's assumption of the presidency of the Council of the EU and expressed his expectation that this would be a successful period not only for Bulgaria but also for the whole of Europe. Furthermore, Borissov and Ulusoy discussed details regarding the forthcoming meeting between the leaders of the European institutions and Turkey. Borissov and Ulusoy agreed that Bulgaria and Turkey will continue to actively support bilateral co-operation because, apart from being Bulgaria's neighbor, the Turkish state is also an important partner in the field of migration, the fight against terrorism, and in agriculture and energy. (www.balkaneu.com)

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, motion of no confidence against the Prime Minister Boiko Borissov's current

Government, tabled by the opposition socialists on the topic of corruption was rejected by the Parliament. Borissov did not attend the session, having also missed the five-hour debate on the motion held earlier in the week, as a vote of 131 against the motion, 103 in favor, with no abstentions, was administered. In addition to Borissov's Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria Party (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) and the junior partners in the ruling coalition, the nationalist United Patriots Party (Обединени Патриоти), the Government was also backed by Will (Воля - Volya), the smallest party in the current National Assembly, and the sole independent MP in the House. The votes in favor of the motion came entirely from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (Българска социалистическа партия – BSP) and the predominantly ethnic Turk Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Движение за права и свободи – DPS). (www.sofiaglobe.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Bulgaria focuses its efforts on the EU Presidency which in fact is a challenging test for the country. Its initiatives towards regional security and good neighboring (friendship agreement with F.Y.R.O.M, Western Balkans summit, initiative for EC – Turkey meeting etc) highlight its constructive role in the region as a factor of stability. However restoring the EU – Turkey relations is very high in Bulgarian agenda and focuses its efforts in promoting such plan. Security situation stable; no major threats.*



**CROATIA:** January 25<sup>th</sup>, Croatian Minister of Interior Davor Bozinovic speaking at

an informal meeting of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council in Sofia said that every country has a sovereign right to protect its borders and to decide who to allow enter its territory. Bozinovic claimed that Croatia supports the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) as well as the Dublin Regulation but the member states should not be overburdened with the redistribution of asylum seekers and solidarity should be within the capabilities of each member state. Croatian Interior Minister stressed the need for good migration policies in order to make it safe and well managed reducing human trafficking and immigrants smuggling. In his view agreed relocation and resettlement are legal avenues for migration. (www.total-croatia-news.com)

January 25<sup>th</sup>, Defense Minister Damir Krsticevic informed lawmakers of the proposed amendments to the Defense Law claiming that the changes aim at upgrading and enhancing the defense system and at making Croatia's Armed Forces stronger and ready for future challenges. Opposition expressed its concerns over the proposed amendments and mainly because they believe that conscription will be introduced in the Armed Forces. According to the Minister main goal of the Defense Law amendments is to broaden the legislative basis for more efficient activity of the defense sector that is supposed to take over a key role in the homeland security system in line with the requirements laid down in the National Security Strategy and the legislation on the homeland security system. The changes introduce mandatory reservist duty with contractual and mobilized reservist units. During 2017 over 10,000 people received a ten days training as reservists and this year the number is to be increased in 20,000. Minister also underlined that



it is recorded arising interest in voluntary military training. Vesna Pusic from the opposition Civic Liberal Alliance (Građansko-liberalni Savez - GLAS) asked if this is the first step for reintroducing conscription in the Armed Forces after it was abolished in 2007. Pusic said *“If the Government reassures us that this is not the case we will vote for the proposed amendments.”* Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske – SDP) MP Franko Vidovic expressed his fear for further militarization of the defense and security system to the detriment of civilian sector. Vidovic criticized the engagement of the Army in efforts to put wildfires as a stopgap measure. The Minister replied that the Armed Forces have three main tasks: defending the country, providing collective security, and offering assistance to civilian institutions. Law changes aim at upgrading the defense system in the present – day context said Krsticevic while he reiterated that conscription was not abolished but frozen. Bridge (Most Nezavisnih Lista – Most) Party lawmaker Ines Strenja Linic said that Croatia should develop a reservist system according to the model of the U.S National Guard. However both the ruling majority and opposition welcomed the proposed amendments to the legislation of the Armed Forces aimed at enhancing the standards and work conditions of service people and improving conditions for their professional developments. (www.total-croatia-news.com)

- January 27<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said that the procedure of the evaluation of bids for the procurement of fighter jets for Croatia Air Force is under way adding that this topic was in his agenda in Davos World Economic Forum not only with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu but also with his Greek counterpart

Alexis Tsipras as well as with the Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven in November 2017. Plenkovic statement came after Israeli Prime Minister’s press release *“Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday in Davos met with Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic; they agreed to move forward on the sale of Israeli F-16s to Croatia according to the terms of the tender. This development is a further expression of the deep ties between the two countries.”* Plenkovic claimed that he has discussed the same topic with his Greek counterpart on the margins of the World Economic Forum in Davos. According to Plenkovic consultations are part of the plan for procurement of fighter jets. *“We will make a final decision after we are sure from all aspects that we made the right choice providing a long term solution to the Croatian Air Force for next thirty years,”* Plenkovic said. (www.total-croatia-news.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Tension with Slovenia rises and determined messages are sent by both sides. The EU and its member states also express their concern over the dispute. It is estimated that both side will avoid escalation of situation despite that Slovenia has sent the first fines against Croat fishermen. Security situation stable but is monitored although tension remains in political level exclusively.*



**CYPRUS:** January 25<sup>th</sup>,

Government spokesperson Nikos Christodoulides said that the series of navigational warnings (NAVTEX) issued by Turkey, by which it reserved swathes of Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), are illegitimate and in any case they

do not affect the island's ongoing gas exploration program. According to Christodoulides Cyprus will press on with its energy plans regardless Turkish actions; *"To us, these [Turkish] NAVTEX, these notices to mariners, do not exist. They have already been cancelled, and no one takes them into account or imparts any legitimacy to them,"* Christodoulides claimed. The best response to the usual Turkish bravado in the eastern Mediterranean, he added, is the continuation of Cyprus' gas exploration activities. *"At the moment, there is in progress an important drill and we hope to have the results soon,"* he said, referring to the ongoing exploratory drill by companies TOTAL and ENI in offshore block 6. The results of the drill, which began in late December 2017, are expected in early February 2018. After concluding its operations in block 6, the drillship will almost immediately head to block 3 (also licensed to ENI) for another exploratory drill. The target in block 3 is codenamed "Soupia" (cuttlefish). (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 26<sup>th</sup>, leaders of four parties in the north occupied part of Cyprus that have been in consultations to form a coalition "Government" have come to an understanding. According to media reports in the north, following almost three weeks of negotiations after the January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018 "elections", leaders of the Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti - DP), Republican Turkish Party (Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi - CTP), People's Party (Halkın Partisi - HP), and the Communal Democracy Party (Toplumcu Demokrasi Partisi - TDP) said they have reached a *"positive outcome."* The National Unity Party (Ulusal Birlik Partisi - UBP) took first place in the "elections" in the north but failed to win a majority. UBP leader and "Prime Minister"

Huseyin Ozgurgun was handed the task of forming a "Government" on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018 by Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci. He has 15 days to form a coalition and if he fails he will have to return the task to Akinci. CTP, HP, and TDP have all ruled out forming a "Government" with Ozgurgun's UBP, while the head of DP Serdar Denktash considers cooperation between the UBP and the Rebirth Party (Yeniden Doğuş Partisi - YDP) which is mainly composed of Turkish settlers as a possible scenario. He said earlier in the week he was being pressured into forming a three-way coalition with UBP and YDP. The CTP, HP, TDP, and DP would have in the "Parliament" 26 seats in total out of 50, just enough to form a coalition "Government." The head of CTP Tufan Erhuman said after a meeting with the other three leaders that they have reached a positive result and that they will inform their parties' collective bodies on the outcome. The issue, he said, will become clear on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Ozgurgun had criticized the four-way coalition talks saying it is against the will of people and called it a *"civilian coup."* (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 28<sup>th</sup>, current President Nicos Anastasiades made it through to the second round of the presidential elections scheduled for February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018, gaining 35.5% of the votes. Anastasiades will be running against Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού – AKEL)-backed independent Stavros Malas who received 30.25%. The third main contender leader of Democratic Party (Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα - DIKO) Nicolas Papadopoulos with 25.75% is out of the running. Papadopoulos' spokeswoman Anna Prokopiou said Papadopoulos will announce if and who DIKO would support in the second round. At

AKEL headquarters in Nicosia, the party's General-Secretary Andros Kyprianou thanked "tens of thousands" of AKEL voters and everyone else that voted for Malas. "Today's votes paved the way for a brighter future," in the form of Malas who can bring about a solution to the Cyprus problem and an improved economy with the average person and middle class in mind, he said. "Cyprus can change direction and move forward [with Malas] who will clamp down on corruption," Kyprianou concluded. The two leading candidates will have to seek support from the seven other candidates but practically, this means the two with a significant voter base, Citizens' Alliance (Συμμαχία Πολιτών) leader Giorgos Lillikas and far-right National People's Front (Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο – ELAM) who gained 2.17% and 5.6% respectively. The other four independents took less than 1% of the votes in total. Noteworthy was the fact that ELAM's Christos Christou took twice the votes of Lillikas who is likely hoping to negotiate his support with one of the two contenders on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018 for a ministerial position. Malas has already stated categorically that he would not be seeking the support of ELAM between the first and second rounds. He is the only candidate to pledge this. Deputy Spokesman Victoras Papadopoulos said: "Anastasiades is the change people need. After five difficult years we have reached a point where development, safety and security are visible as opposed to the five years in 2008 and 2013. The next day dilemma is unity. We believe, President Nicos Anastasiades has proven he can achieve unity in the sector of modernizing the state and Cyprus problem." Voters' turnout reached 71.4%. (www.cypus-mail.com)

*Cyprus is preparing for the second round of presidential elections scheduled for February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Anastasiades confirmed polls and got first place and it is estimated that he will win in the second round. However it is not so clear that he will be the winner since Malas achieved a significant percentage of the first round. ELAM voters' political behavior will be crucial for the final result. Security risk rises in the region due to the imminent sea drills for gas and oil research in areas of the Cypriot EEZ. Turkish reactions remain in rhetoric level at the moment. Announcement of the drill's results by the ENI – TOTAL Corporation in the Cypriot offshore block 6 in February 2018 may be cause of tension between Turkey and Cyprus.*



**F.Y.R.O.M:** January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Bulgaria supports efforts of the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev's Government, institutions, civil society sector and media for F.Y.R.O.M's return on the path to Euro-Atlantic integration, Bulgarian Ambassador to Skopje Ivan Velikov Petkov said during presentation of Bulgarian priorities during the EU Council presidency. "Yesterday we received an encouraging message in Davos at the meeting between Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and his Greek counterpart Alexis Tsipras, which raised hopes for resolving the name dispute," Petkov said. According to Petkov, F.Y.R.O.M has a historic chance to open the EU accession talks this year. "The Western Balkans is a central priority of Bulgaria's foreign policy and key priority in Bulgarian EU Council presidency. We are convinced that the EU should affirm European perspective of all Balkan countries and to encourage them for pro-European reforms," he pointed out. (www.mia.mk)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

- January 24<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev met in Davos World Economic Forum with his Greek counterpart Alexis Tsipras. Meeting was lasted for almost three hours and it was announced F.Y.R.O.M and Greece will increase the level of the name negotiation process. The future process will be attended by the Foreign Ministers of both countries, under the auspices of the United Nations. Zaev announced that the meeting expressed the good will and the readiness of F.Y.R.O.M to show that there is indeed a willingness to resolve the dispute. In that direction the Government will rename the airport and the highway. He added that from now on the highway will be called "Friendship." *"This is evidence of the fact that we do not have a territorial aspiration towards our neighbor. On the other hand, they also proved their good will towards us trying to enable us in advanced cooperation with the European Union and other international institutions,"* Zaev said. He added that the majority of citizens of both countries wish close and friendly relations, which will contribute to strengthening mutual cooperation. *"We want to become equal partners in the EU and loyal NATO partners. We want to stand side by side to help each other, to support each other in difficult and challenging moments. We have shown in the past that when both countries have serious challenges we can work together for mutual interest,"* Zaev said. Compound "erga omnes" name and dealing with irredentism in all forms requested Tsipras from Zaev at their meeting in Davos. (www.nezavisem.mk)

- January 28<sup>th</sup>, the content of the initial framework tabled by the UN name mediator Matthew Nimetz at the name talks held on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018 in New York, details of the meeting of Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and his Greek counterpart

Alexis Tsipras as well as the course of the process to accelerate negotiations aimed at finding a name solution was the focal point of the first coordination meeting of state and political leaders regarding the name issue. Meeting was "informative" and "constructive" concluded by all participants in the five hours meeting that took place at the MPs' Club in Skopje. After the meeting, no one shared details about Nimetz's proposal. Participants claimed that would hold meetings in the same format in the future so as to coordinate their stance towards a name's solution. Meeting was attended by Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov and Defense Minister Radmila Sekerinska. President Gjorge Ivanov, Democratic Union for Integration (Демократска унија за интеграција – DUI) leader Ali Ahmeti, who was joined by Deputy Prime Minister Bujar Osmani, and leader of the opposition party Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) Hristijan Mickoski were also in attendance. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Premier Zaev said that he is "optimistic" and that a national consensus could be reached. President Ivanov said he expected that in the future the Government would inform them about the entire process and that all activities would be coordinated. VMRO-DPMNE leader Hristijan Mickoski said that from now on the negotiating process is in the hands of the Government adding he expected to be informed in-depth about the process in the future. According to the opposition leader, such a coordination meeting should have taken place much earlier. Mickoski told journalists that he did not want to comment on Nimetz's proposals because *"the process is in*

*progress.*” The DUI leader called the coordination meeting “*a beginning of the end of an important process.*” Ali Ahmeti said the meeting was “*quite constructive*” but did not provide more details from the meeting so as not to harm the process. The coordination meeting of F.Y.R.O.M state and political leaders on the name issue was held ahead of the UN name envoy's visit to Skopje. Matthew Nimetz will pay a visit to Athens on January 29<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018 before traveling to Skopje on January 31<sup>st</sup> and February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. (www.nezavisem.mk)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Newly elected Government works intensively in stabilizing political situation both inside and outside the country. Resolution of the “name” dispute with the neighboring Greece is the most challenging task “opening the gates” for the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country. Prime Minister Zaev works on achieving internal political cohesion towards an accepted name solution. President’s Ivanov veto against the “language law” set an obstacle in Government’s efforts to stabilize interethnic relations with F.Y.R.O.M’s Albanians. It is assessed that Ivanov works intensively by setting obstacles to topple Zaev’s Government in favor of opposition VMRO-DPMNE.*



**GREECE:** January 23<sup>rd</sup>, Ankara lodged a third request for the extradition of the eight Turkish servicemen who fled to Greece in July 2016 following a failed coup in the neighboring country, sources said. The request by Ankara was lodged just a few hours after Greek Justice Minister Stavros Kontonis received in Athens a delegation from the Turkish Justice

Ministry where, according to sources, the Turkish officials underlined Turkey's insistence on the return of the eight men who are accused of treason. The same sources indicate that Ankara has included new claims about the servicemen in its third request for their extradition. Speaking after a meeting with Turkey’s Deputy Justice Minister Bilal Ucar in Athens, Kontonis said that the eight could not be send back given that the country’s Supreme Court has rejected the original extradition request. Kontonis said the ruling was “*fully respected by everyone and the Greek Government.*” However, he said a proposal to try them in Athens was still on the table adding that it would be up to Ankara “*to take the appropriate legal steps.*” (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 27<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras held individual meetings with opposition party leaders to discuss the state of negotiations with Skopje over the name dispute. Discussions did not yield any significant signs of consensus between the politicians. New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis accused Tsipras of failing to consult properly before launching talks and to create a “*strong national front,*” thereby undermining an opportunity to reach a settlement with F.Y.R.O.M. “*Mr Tsipras chose to walk this road alone so he should not look for accomplices and alibis,*” said Mitsotakis, who suggested that Greeks have no confidence in Tsipras’s ability to negotiate on this, or any other, issue. The Prime Minister’s office responded to Mitsotakis’s comments by accusing him of “*irresponsibility and opportunism.*” Hellenic Socialist Movement (Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα – PASOK) leader Fofi Gennimata also criticized Tsipras for not reaching out to the other parties before launching talks. “*Mr Tsipras entered into negotiations without even securing*

*consensus within his own Government,”* she said in reference to the stance taken by governmental partner Panos Kammenos and his party Independent Greeks (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες – ANEL). Gennimata stressed that any solution must address any irredentist plans in F.Y.R.O.M and not just the country’s name. She repeated her call for the Council of Political Leaders under the President of Hellenic Republic for further discussions. Greek Communist Party (Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας - ΚΚΕ) leader Dimitris Koutsoumbas stressed the need for changes to be made to F.Y.R.O.M’s constitution to address concerns about irredentism. He said that a solution to the dispute with Skopje does not seem likely. To Potami (Το Ποτάμι) leader Stavros Theodorakis said it is “*ridiculous*” that the Defense Minister should have a different position to the Prime Minister and the Government on this issue. He added that his party would support a solution that involves a compound name in Slavic for Greece’s neighbor. “*There are many options that are better than Upper Macedonia,*” he said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 28<sup>th</sup>, Defense Minister Panos Kammenos threw a wreath into the sea off the uninhabited islets of Imia in the eastern Aegean Sea on the anniversary of a crisis that brought Greece and Turkey to the brink of war in 1996 and cost the lives of three Hellenic Navy servicemen. The Turkish Coast Guard maintained an overt presence, sending patrol boats and a helicopter to monitor the ceremony, which took place from the deck of the Hellenic Navy “NIKIFOROS” gunboat less than a dozen kilometers of Turkey’s shores. The Turkish Foreign Ministry meanwhile, issued an announcement claiming that the “Coast Guard

prevented the Greek Defense Minister from approaching a pair of Turkish islets in the Aegean,” according to Anadolu news agency. Turkey disputes Greece’s sovereignty over these and other islands of the eastern Aegean Sea. (www.ekathimerini.com)



Greek Defense Minister Panos Kammenos throw  
a wreath in Imia islets

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

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*Political and security stability so far. Diplomatic initiatives for resolving the “name” dispute with F.Y.R.O.M may cause political instability due to the different political stance among the two coalition partners. Coalition partner Panos Kammenos’ stance is a key factor for future political upheavals. Parliamentary parties assess political cost of their stance in the issue. The Government is accused of “secret diplomacy and negotiations” and consensus is difficult to be reached. Turkey keeps on “low level” tension in the Aegean Sea (violation of F.I.R and/or territorial sea by fighter jets and navy or coast guard vessels respectively). However it strengthens its rhetoric over sovereignty of several Greek islands and islets in the Aegean Sea.*





## KOSOVO: January 23<sup>rd</sup>, Head of

the EU Office in Kosovo, Nataliya Apostolova, said that Kosovo urgently needs to ratify the border demarcation deal with Montenegro. According to Apostolova, Kosovo should not remain hostage of individuals because this agreement is of the national interest. Apostolova commented on the situation while attending an event hosted jointly with the Bulgarian Ambassador to Kosovo, Nedialtcho Dantchev, which was held to highlight the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union to the Kosovo public. Ratification of this agreement is one of the two remaining criteria for Kosovo to obtain visa liberalization within the EU Schengen area. However, ruling coalition partners are divided when discussing the ratification. The Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj stated earlier that his party – the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës – AAK) does not support the current version of the agreement and its MPs will vote against the ratification if brought to the Assembly. Haradinaj claims that under current agreement, which was signed in 2015, Kosovo loses more than 8,000 hectares of land. On the other hand the other ruling coalition partner – the Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Demokratike e Kosovës – PDK) and opposition party Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës – LDK) are in favor of the agreement. According to the legislation ruling of the Assembly, 81 votes out of 120 are needed to ratify an international agreement. The ruling coalition lacks majority in Parliament to ratify the border deal. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Parliament of Kosovo has confirmed that they have submitted a draft law to the Government, pushing forward a controversial attempt to scrap the law on Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecution Office, established to try alleged crimes of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Assembly of Kosovo confirmed to Gazeta Express that they have sent the Draft Law to Government. *“Today, the request of the Assembly’s Presidency on a legislation initiative has been submitted to the Government,”* Ismet Krasniqi, Secretary at the Assembly of Kosovo said. However, Halil Matoshi, political advisor to Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, said that no initiative has been submitted by the Assembly’s Secretariat. *“No, the Government has not received any document,”* Matoshi claimed. The Special Court saga started on the night of December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 when three Kosovo top leaders, President Hashim Thaci, Speaker of Assembly Kadri Veseli, and Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj pushed MPs to take the initiative on revoking of the Special Court law, which will investigate and try alleged crimes committed by the KLA during and after the war in Kosovo. Only the Speaker of Parliament and Head of the ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Demokratike e Kosovës – PDK) has publicly stated that they have withdrawn from the initiative. The three Kosovo main leaders were also top leaders of the KLA during the Kosovo war 1998-99. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 23<sup>rd</sup>, Kosovo Minister of European Integration, Dhurata Hoxha, is concerned with the new EU enlargement strategy for the Balkans if it excludes Kosovo from enlargement plans. *“There should be a clear timetable and a concrete plan of enlargement [for Kosovo], such as granting candidate status, application or opening of*

*negotiations,” Hoxha said. Next month, the European Commission is set to adopt a new strategy on the European Union’s enlargement into the Western Balkans. Hoxha said that there is a broad-based consensus in Kosovo when it comes to EU integration process. “Kosovo is at the early stage of the integration process comparing with other Balkan region countries. The year 2017 was a year of elections in Kosovo and we did not manage to deliver much when it comes to EU integration process. During this year we will intensify the EU integration process,” said Hoxha. She also stated that Kosovo is working in many fields in order to achieve tangible results when it comes to the EU integration confirming that authorities are ready to fulfill the remaining criteria. When asked to comment recent political developments in Kosovo, the Minister of European Integration said that Kosovo should be more serious and respect international obligations. “We have failed to ratify the demarcation agreement with Montenegro and this is a bad signal. This shows that Kosovo is not ready to respect international obligations. Therefore we remained isolated even in 2018,” forewarned Hoxha referring to the failure to ratify the border deal with Montenegro, which is one of the last criteria for Kosovo to obtain visa free regime with the EU. (www.gazetaexpress.com)*

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :**

*Assassination of Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic set a major threat for Kosovo stability and security due to interethnic tension between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs. It is of critical importance the case to be resolved by the authorities proving their commitment in enforcing rule of law in the country and to remove mistrust*

*between the two communities. Previous efforts for the establishment of Armed Forces without constitutional amendments may strengthen security instability in the region in coming months. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Kosovo political elite set obstacles in significant issues provoking reactions from international community. International presence guarantees security, law and order in the state so far. Kosovo which is not a UN member is quite far from the Euro-Atlantic path due to structural and institutional problems.*



**MOLDOVA:** January 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration of Moldova, Iurie Leanca, paid a visit to the European Commission and the European Parliament. During his meeting with the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, Leanca reportedly informed her about implementing reforms stipulated by the Association Agreement, in particular, justice reform usage of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) potential and fulfilling the conditions for macro-financial assistance. Mogherini highlighted the importance of following the recommendations of international partners in key areas related to reforms and democracy in the country. As the press release of the European external Action Service (EEAS) said “the EU is closely following developments with regard to the electoral framework, the media sector, and the major banking fraud unveiled in 2014, where essential tasks such as criminal investigations and recovering misappropriated funds have not been completed.” In addition,



Mogherini emphasized that Moldova's progress in key reform areas such as the judiciary and the fight against corruption is needed for the Association Agreement to be beneficial for all Moldovans. Talking with the Vice President of the EU Commission for the Energy Union, Maros Sefcovic, Moldova's Deputy Prime Minister asked for the EU's support in the projects of connecting the gas and electricity networks of Moldova with those of Romania. Neighborhood and Enlargement Commissioner, Johannes Hahn, encouraged Leanca's Government to continue the implementation of reforms. The Financial Stability Commissioner, Valdis Dombrovskis, informed Leanca about a mission of the Commission's Directorate General for Economy and Finances coming to Moldova in February 2018. It reportedly will evaluate how Moldova meets the criteria for the disbursement of the first tranche of the macro-financial assistance. Leanca also met several EPP, Liberal and Green MEPs from the European Parliament. (www.moldova.org)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Political life is "hostage" of the pro-Russian President Igor Dodon and pro-Western Government rivalry which undermines the institutional function of the country. In the wider framework Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. The "Transnistria case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.*



### **MONTENEGRO:** January

24<sup>th</sup>, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said he is convinced that there would be a "wake-up

*call"* in Montenegro regarding Russia, adding that the country stopped mentioning Russia's involvement in the attempted terrorist case. *"Montenegro has [now] stopped mentioning Russia's involvement in events about which they were so verbally concerned [the attempt of the state coup and assassination attempt of Milos Djukanovic last year that citizens of Russia and Serbia are suspected of involvement]. Nevertheless, I believe that there will be a wake-up call,"* Lavrov said. When asked to comment on U.S. accusations about the role of Russia in Southeast Europe, Lavrov ironically said that *"Russia was not blamed only for the Balkans, but also for interfering with Mexico, and possibly somewhere else as well."* Explaining the role of Russia in the Balkans, Lavrov said that Russia *"is blamed everywhere"* and, as far as Serbia is concerned, *"the country [Serbia] is blamed for everything that happened in the Balkans."* Lavrov claimed that the Balkan states were *"traditional and close friends"* of Russia, because, as he pointed out, some of them shared the same religion with the Russians. *"I do not see any other role,"* said the Russian Foreign Minister. (www.cdm.me)

- January 25<sup>th</sup>, by the end of the month, the Ministry of Defense will sign a contract with a Canadian company for the procurement of three medium, multi-purpose helicopters, the ministry announced. After analyzing all technical aspects of the submitted bids in the tender, Montenegrin Air Force proposed acquisition helicopters produced by Bell Helicopters Company, from Fort Worth, Texas. Purchase concerns two helicopters Bell 412EPI and one Bell 412EP. All three helicopters will be delivered to Montenegro this year. (www.cdm.me, www.pobjeda.net)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Presidential elections have been called for April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018. One could not exclude tension during pre-electoral campaign of the potential candidates. Major reforms should be implemented in order to take steps which will bring the country closer to the EU.*



### **ROMANIA:** January 26<sup>th</sup>,

Romania's appointed Prime Minister Viorica Dancila is to have 16 new ministers in her cabinet, out of a total of 27. She announced the proposed ministers after a meeting of the ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat – PSD) leaders. The new Government led by Viorica Dancila, Romania's first woman Prime Minister and PSD's third Prime Minister in just one year, will have four Deputy Prime Ministers, one more than the previous cabinet headed by Mihai Tudose. Paul Stanescu will remain Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Development in the new Government and Gratiela Gavrilescu will also stay as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Environment. The two new Deputy Prime Ministers are former Finance Minister Viorel Stefan, who doesn't have an allotted portfolio, and former Minister Delegate for European Affairs Ana Birchall, who will be in charge of Romania's relation with its strategic partners, especially the U.S. Carmen Dan will remain Interior Minister in the Dancila Government. She held the same position in the Tudose cabinet, her quarrel with the Prime Minister being the reason that led to Mihai Tudose's resignation. Teodor Melescanu will also remain Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mihai Fifor will continue to be in charge of the Defense Ministry, Lia Olguta Vasilescu will keep the

Labor portfolio, and Tudorel Toader will still be Justice Minister. Most of the new Ministers come from PSD organizations in Moldova and Transylvania, which had very few representatives in the cabinets led by Sorin Grindeanu and Mihai Tudose. The new Government has to get the Parliament's confidence vote on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018. ([www.romania-insider.com](http://www.romania-insider.com))

- January 26<sup>th</sup>, the EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Vera Jourova has stated before an informal meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs EU ministers that the European Commission is closely following the situation in Romania, amid anti-corruption street protests and controversial amendments on the justice laws. The Commissioner said that Commission was following closely the situation in Romania where citizens are protesting against the latest judicial reform and corruption. *“The European Commission wants to see reforms leading to a more independent and better functioning judiciary and greater public confidence in it. The developments in Romania could cause concern that things are not moving in the right direction,”* she pointed out adding that the Commission suggested dialogue. A row escalated in Bucharest between the Romanian Speakers of the Parliament and the European Commission on the justice laws topic. The Speakers of the Romanian Parliament's Chambers had said in a joint letter that the European Commission is misinformed about the developments of the justice law amendments in Bucharest while the EU Executive replied that, on the contrary, it is well informed on the process. However, Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat – PSD) Chairman and Chamber Speaker Liviu Dragnea insisted on the idea that the European Commission officials are

misinformed about the track in the Parliament and the content of the justice laws. Dragnea announced he would present in the upcoming days “a lie” officially delivered to the European Commission. Asked before the party’s executive committee to decide the upcoming Government how he sees the EC’s latest warnings and the fact that the European officials had said they are well informed about the situation in Romania, Dragnea replied: “*It means it is very well. For instance, we’ll present in the coming days a lie that has been officially delivered from here and I think it’s good they know about it. I think it’s important for us and for the Commission to have a partnership relation based on truth and correct information.*” (www.romaniajournal.com)

January 26<sup>th</sup>, while attending an event of the Romanian-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, President Klaus Iohannis said he would ask assurances from the upcoming Government to ensure Romania’s economic stability. “I assure you I am updated on the concerns and the difficulties that the business environment is facing. In this respect, I will come into the new Government’s notice, as I have always done it, over the political decision makers’ responsibilities to provide, above all, Romania’s economic stability. The upcoming Government must understand how important is to not to jeopardize the fiscal sustainability and Romania’s development potential for a long term, through imprudent policies and speculative measures.” he stated. He announced he would talk to the new Government and ask for consultations with the people in charge of the economic sector, so that “there are guarantees of stability from the government.” However Iohannis warned that despite Romania’s record economic growth in the EU last year, the figures do not reflect the quality

of the economic policies while “the progress of the business environment was rather obtained in spite of these policies.” (www.romaniajournal.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Romania avoided early parliamentary elections and the new Government will get confidence vote from the Parliament on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018. However it seems that an EU – Romania crisis has broken out due to the Justice Laws adopted last year by the Parliament. Not only the EU but also opposition and civic society of Romania raise questions over justice independence. However Romania as member of the EU and NATO enjoys stability.*



**SERBIA:** January 23<sup>rd</sup>, First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic said the possibility of Serbia accepting Kosovo's UN membership is a mirage. “*It would be good if a lasting solution were to be found. But when they talk about a solution for Kosovo in the West, they mostly think of us accepting the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo, and that's a fairytale. For Serbia to recognize Kosovo, for Kosovo to get a chair in the UN, for us to suggest to Russia to vote in favor of it; that's not a fairytale, that's a mirage. That won't happen,*” Dacic said. Dacic claimed that although the decision is made by the UN Security Council, Kosovo's UN membership really depends on Serbia's position because Russia and China will respect Serbia's wish. Asked whether his stance differs from that of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic who said that Kosovo's membership in the UN could be considered if Serbia gets something in return Dacic said that “*all these variants can be*

*discussed if there is a permanent solution, if there is a deal between Belgrade and Pristina.”* Speaking about the draft of the EU strategy for the Western Balkans - which states that the EU will ask Serbia to reach a comprehensive agreement on normalization of relations with Kosovo by the beginning of 2019 if it wants to join by 2025 Dacic said that if this is also contained in the final version of the strategy, Serbia's response will be as before to accept only what is in its interests. Dacic added *“The EU does not have a united position on Kosovo, because there are countries that have not recognized it. And even if they had a united position, we're are not interested in that.”* Foreign Minister said that the continuation of the dialogue with Pristina in Brussels can only occur after there has been *“some information”* about the murder of Oliver Ivanovic or when light has been shed on the case. Asked whether the Russians were "friends or partners" to Serbia Dacic said *“I do not like to treat us in this issue emotionally or irrationally, but in accordance with our interests. If Russia vetoes the UN Security Council resolution on Srebrenica and supports us in international forums regarding Kosovo, and if we cannot count on Western countries when it comes to that, I must make a distinction.”* Speaking about the name dispute between Athens and Skopje over the latter's use of the word “Macedonia” Dacic recalled that *“Skopje recognized Kosovo and voted in favor of its membership in UNESCO while Greece is a friendly country that did not recognize Kosovo. If someone gives priority to Pristina over Belgrade that represents a political message.”* (www.b92.net, www.beta.rs)



Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic

(Photo source: www.mfa.gov.rs)

- January 23<sup>rd</sup>, Liberal Democratic Party (Liberalno demokratska partija - LDP) released a statement claiming that the country *“needs a new, modern Constitution”* in which Kosovo and protection of human and minority rights should be approached in a different manner, as well as the position of Vojvodina. *“The working draft of amendments to the Constitution in the field of the judiciary confirmed that the government of Serbia does not have the courage to answer the key issues and problems citizens face but deals with technical matters.”* The statement concluded *“Serbia needs a debate about a new Constitution, but it must not be held behind closed doors resulting, like in 2006, in the highest legal act that does not meet the needs of people living in Serbia, but of the parties that decide about the lives of all of us.”* (www.b92.net, www.beta.rs)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

*Relative political stability. Security situation is stable. It seems that next two years (2018 – 2019) will be a key period for a solution in Kosovo case. The EU is going to strengthen its pressure for a mutual accepted solution as a precondition for both countries to enter the EU. The Kosovo issue creates a fragile balance on permanent basis.*



**SLOVENIA:** January 26<sup>th</sup>, the

President Borut Pahor announced that under current circumstances he is “*reluctant to recognize Palestine*.” According to his office, Pahor supports the diplomatic recognition of Palestine taking into consideration that this recognition would help normalize bilateral issues with Israel, and not to aggravate them. The President estimates that “at the moment we have not witnessed such circumstances.” According to the President, the common foreign policy of the European Union should be more ambitious and influential than in the past in the peaceful resolution of the Middle East issues. Pahor stressed that he had already proven his knowledge and influence in the conclusion of the nuclear agreement with Iran. Pahor's office also stated that the President has personal talks with the Israeli and Palestinian leaders and that efforts are being made by both sides for a solution where Israel and Palestine would live side by side in peace and security. Pahor believes that the current situation has worsened the situation and confidence. Therefore, he is reluctant to take unilateral measures that do not improve the situation and deepen mistrust. Pahor responded to the announcement made by the Slovenian Foreign Minister Karl Erjavec that Slovenia should recognize the state of Palestine under the current circumstances. The reason for this is, in particular, the decision of the U.S President Donald Trump to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In December 2017 the Slovenian Government adopted a decision to support the continuation of the Palestinian recognition process, which was also to be discussed by the National Assembly's Foreign Policy Committee on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The Prime Minister Miro Cerar has indicated that the recognition of

Palestine is supported by all coalition parties. However on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018 leaders of the Congress of all 48 major American Jewish organizations voiced concern on the announcement that the Slovenian Parliament will discuss the recognition of Palestine. They called Slovenian Prime Minister Mira Cerar not to recognize Palestine because, according to them, there is no justification; “*We hope that Slovenia will continue to play a constructive role by encouraging Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to return to the table of negotiations*,” Jewish leaders announced. Prime Minister Miro Cerar responded to the call from Davos, Switzerland, saying that the decision to continue the process of recognition of Palestine was endorsed by all three coalition parties. “*Recognition is something fair for Palestinians*,” added Cerar. Foreign Minister Karl Erjavec said in a statement to that Slovenia will not change its decision. He also said that he has received positive responses from Jewish academics from Israel on the announcement that Slovenia will recognize Palestine. ([www.dnevnik.si](http://www.dnevnik.si))

- January 26<sup>th</sup>, Slovenian Police sent the first 14 payment orders to Croatian fishermen for violation of sea borders of Slovenia implementing the arbitration award between Croatia and Slovenia regarding the Piran Bay. Police announced that it will continue to implement legislation in the same way in the next week in the case of violations related to the illicit crossing of the Slovenian maritime border. Police conduct these proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Minor Offenses Act. In such cases, offenses have an international dimension, as violators are foreign citizens. These cases are subject of special procedural provisions of the law, which the police is obliged to follow.



Payment orders for Croatian fishermen were sent to offenders namely natural people and not to Croatian institutions. Each offense procedure is individual. The perpetrator who fails to pay the fine may be refused to enter Slovenia. (www.dnevnik.si)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Tension with Croatia remains in political level exclusively. Although there political voices calling for dialogue Slovenia looks fully determined to implement the arbitration award acting unilaterally. Security situation is closely monitored*



**TURKEY:** January 25<sup>th</sup>, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said that Turkey and Austria looked to normalize relations after months of tensions between Ankara and Vienna. Speaking at a joint news conference with his Austrian counterpart Karin Kneissl who visited Turkey, Cavusoglu said: *“We’ve agreed to normalize our relations. It will be more beneficial to speak [to each other] directly, stop communicating through the press.”* Kneissl said: *“We know we have some disagreements between each other. This is not a secret [...] but we think that there are many subjects between Vienna and Ankara that we can negotiate. This was the main reason for coming here.”* Regarding Operation OLIVE BRANCH, the Austrian minister said: *“I told [Cavusoglu] that we have been following the developments here [in Afrin] with concern [...]. I can say that we have agreed that all the subjects here [in Afrin] could be resolved actually through negotiation. We said that political decisions should be taken here.”* (www.aa.com.tr)

- January 28<sup>th</sup>, Turkey’s Operation “OLIVE BRANCH” against the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) forces in Syria’s Afrin entered its second week. According to the Turkish newspaper Haberturk, 6,400 soldiers of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) are involved in the operation. According to the TAF *“340 targets of the PKK [Kurdistan Workers’ Party], KCK [Kurdistan Communities Union], PYD/YPG [Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party/People’s protection Units], and ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] terror organizations have been destroyed.”* The TAF General Staff underlined that it is taking the utmost care during the operation to not harm any civilians; *“The only things being targeted are terrorists, and any shelters, pits, weapons, vehicles, and equipment that belong to them,”* and added *“Operation OLIVE BRANCH is successfully continuing as planned.”* According to the military three Turkish soldiers were killed and 30 injured, while 13 members of the Turkey’s local ally the Free Syrian Army (FSA) were killed and 24 injured during the operation. On day eight of the operation, Turkish forces and the FSA took full control of the Ali Bakki district of the town of Raju, northwest of Afrin, Turkey’s state-run Anadolu Agency reported from the field. Also, an area in Raju known as point 740 and a militia training camp were seized. However the Head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights Rami Abdel Rahman in an interview to Deutsche Welle claimed that *“The Turkish military is attacking along 10 corridors north and west of Afrin. Turkey and the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which supports it, are making slow progress because of fierce Kurdish resistance. Over the course of six days, they only conquered two villages and parts of five others. That is not much considering the number and intensity of Turkish airstrikes and*

*Turkey's statements at the onset of the campaign. In reality, Turkish troops have barely advanced into the Kurdish-controlled enclave of Afrin in northern Syria. In contrast to reports from both warring parties, our sources have confirmed a total of 133 fatalities so far: 47 Kurdish fighters, 51 FSA militants, four Turkish soldiers, 31 civilians killed by Turkish fire and two by Kurdish forces.” According to Abdel Rahman “Mainly Arabic and Turkmen FSA fighters from Aleppo, Idlib and Deir el-Zour support the Turkish forces. There are claims that the Nusra Front has joined the campaign against the YPG. But that's not true. According to our information, claims that Chechen forces have joined the Turkish side are also false. So far, only Syrians are fighting alongside the Turkish army.” Finally Abdel Rahman claimed that Russians put pressure to Kurds with the Turkish operation aiming at ceding Afrin to Assad to prevent it from falling under Turkish control “In reality, that's what the Russians are demanding. They're putting pressure on the Kurds to hand over control over Afrin to Damascus. Russia wants all regions west of the river Euphrates to be under Syrian control. The Kurds rejected this demand. In response, Russia gave Turkey the go-ahead to attack Kurdish-controlled Afrin. They want to break the Kurdish resistance so they will relinquish control over the region. And the United States is doing nothing to stop this,” adding “Kurds will fight to the end. They have no other choice. They would have long since given in to Russian pressure if they were willing to do so. There are about 1.1 million civilians in Afrin: 600,000 Kurds and 500,000 Arab refugees. The YPG has about 10,000 fighters in the area.” According to the Deputy Chief of General Staff of the FSA Haitham Afeisi, a 10,000-strong force is already prepared for a military operation against Kurdish forces in the*

*city of Manbij. Afeisi said that the Manbij operation will be started after the FSA and the TAF finish their operation against YPG forces in Afrin. “Manbij is not the final destination; we won't stop until Hasakah, Ayn Issa, Ayn al-Arab, Ras al-Ayn, Al-Malikiyah, and Tal Abyad are purged of terror,” he said. This statement clearly follows the official rhetoric of the Turkish leadership. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and others have repeatedly noted that Manbij may become a target of the Turkish military operation. According to the Turkish General Staff, the operation aims to establish security and stability along Turkish borders and the region as well as to protect the Syrian people from the oppression and cruelty of terrorists. (www.aa.com.tr, www.dailysabah.com, www.dw.com, www.hurriyetdailynews.com, www.haberturk.com)*

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :**


*Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. The new extension of the country's state of emergency maintains or even strengthens the abnormality of current political life. The country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of persecution of citizens. In southeastern region of the country there is an ongoing armed conflict between the state's security forces and Kurd guerillas. Turkey has engaged in a military operation against Kurds in Syrian borders invading in fact in Syrian territory with unknown repercussions for the state.*


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

 Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk

 Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict