



**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.

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

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**The administrative Board
of the “HERMES” Institute of
International Affairs, Security &
Goeconomy
wishes you
Happy New Year**



ALBANIA: January 4th, the Albanian Parliament approved a mini reshuffle of the Government in which the Defense Minister, Olta Xhaska appointed as the new Foreign Minister replacing the Prime Minister, Edi Rama who was holding also the external relations portfolio. Niko Peleshi got Xhaska’s position as the new Defense Minister. (www.exit.al)

- January 7th, Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama paid a two days visit in Turkey upon Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan invitation. In a very warm and friendly climate the two countries signed five agreements in the field of education, health, culture and infrastructure. Apart from that the two leaders agreed to establish a High Level Strategic Cooperation Council between the two countries. Finally, Albania and Turkey discussed possible cooperation in the field of defense industry. It should be highlighted that Rama fully rejected the “Fethullahist Terrorist Organization” (FETO) known simply as Gullen Movement, which “poisons relations between the two states.” In his turn, Erdogan promised to build a hospital in the Albanian city of Fier (before the Albanian parliamentary elections scheduled for April 2020)

and to restore a historic Mosque in Shkoder. (www.exit.al)



Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama’s visit in
Turkey

(Photo source: www.kryeministria.al)

- January 8th, the Albanian Constitutional Court is functional again after three years of absence following lots of pressure by the EU and US. Currently, the Court is constituted by seven Judges. (www.tiranatimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Despite ongoing political and constitutional crisis the Albanian Government is taking reform measures seeking to normalize political situation before the parliamentary elections scheduled for April 25th, 2020. Apart from that Edi Rama’s Government is under pressure by the EU and US administration for accelerating reforms in order to facilitate its European route. Albania did not achieve to inaugurate the first intergovernmental conference with the EU within 2020 due to its failure to meet the 15 conditions set by the EU. Europe is pushing Albania for concrete reforms on electoral and judicial sector and in the fight against organized crime and corruption. Besides, political turmoil in the country with ongoing conflicts between the Government, opposition and the President is polarizing climate blocking

further progress in state's reforms. Taking this into consideration, restart of Constitutional Court after three years of absence is an encouraging message for the country's institutional and constitutional normalization. Last week signaled a strong approach between Albania and Turkey. It was not a surprise since the two countries enjoy advanced relations for many years. It is not a secret that Turkey is influencing Albania with several ways. Rama's visit in Turkey brought the two countries much closer; they aspire to upgrade their relations into a strategic level. Corruption, organized crime, money laundering, drug and weapon smuggling and links between politics and organized crime are the main problems Albania should address effectively.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

January 4th, Bosnia's Central Election Commission (CEC) has confirmed the local election results in the southern city of Mostar on Sunday evening. It was the first election Mostar had in 12 years. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 4th, the EC called on the Bosnian authorities to urgently solve the migrant crisis at Camp Lipa, in the country's north-west, noting that the EU has approved 3.5 million Euros in humanitarian aid for the migrants in that camp. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 4th, there could be a "realistic option" for Bosnia's Serb-majority Republika Srpska (RS) entity to become an independent state, the Chairman of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency and its Serb member, Milorad Dodik, said on Tuesday, stressing that the RS strongly opposes the institution of Bosnia's international administrator. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- September 5th, Sarajevo Canton got its third Government in the last two years today, and its Prime Minister will again be Edin Forto from Our Party (Naša Stranka - NS). (www.klix.ba)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bosnia produces more politics than can afford. Elections in cantonal level, establishment of local Governments, decisions on federal and state level; a complicated political system which is undermined from both inside and outside stakeholders. Bosnian Serb leader, Milorad Dodik is openly advocating for Republika Srpska's secession rejecting the Dayton peace agreement and the presence of the international administrator (OHR). Nationalistic rhetoric is always present in the small country affecting relations between its ethnic entities. Currently, the axis Banja Luka – Podgorica – Belgrade favors Bosnian Serbs for upgrading their divisive policy. Under these circumstances the Euro-Atlantic future of Bosnia is rather grey. Besides, the country is in the middle of geopolitical games between the EU and NATO on the one side and Russia on the other. Currently Bosnia is the "weak link" among Balkan states for Russian influence. Migrant crisis in Lipa camp is a "deep sore" for Bosnia. Except its humanitarian dimension which is very important since it is about human lives, current situation threatens peace and security of the northwestern Bosnia.



BULGARIA: January 5th,

President Rumen Radev has begun consultations on holding fair, transparent and safe parliamentary elections for the health of citizens on March 28th, 2021. (www.novinite.com)

- January 6th, Bulgaria's economy was set to grow by 3.3% this year after the estimated 5.1% drop suffered in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, according to the latest World Bank's Global Economic Prospects report, released on January 6th. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Parliamentary elections are scheduled for March 28th, 2021. Opposition's demand for early elections failed to be achieved polarizing political atmosphere in the country. Only coming elections could de-escalate current political situation, although the period until the elections could be tense. The President, Rumen Radev is leading the political struggle against the Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov and his Government. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively; besides these are the reasons for social reaction and unrest. 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 4th, the Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Monday the Government decided to declare a disaster for Sisak - Moslavina County and parts of Zagreb and Karlovac counties after last week's 6.2 earthquake. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- January 7th, expectations for the Croatian economy slightly improved in December 2020,

reflecting a wave of optimism in industry and retail trade during Christmas shopping time, but business leaders signaled a lower need for labor, a monthly report from the EC shows. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The country enjoys political stability. The natural disaster caused by a 6.2 Richter scale earthquake in Sisak - Moslavina County (central-east Croatia) created an emergency situation which the state's mechanism had to respond. There are some complaints for delayed response by the state's mechanism but the Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic rejected such idea and mobilized the whole Government to confirm its presence in the affected area. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: January 5th, a letter by President Nicos Anastasiades containing suggestions on confidence-building measures (CBMs) aimed at boosting the prospects of a solution to the Cyprus problem has been delivered to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Foreign Minister Nicos Christodoulides said on Tuesday. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 8th, the president Nikos Anastasiades hosted on Friday a meeting of party leaders and the House President who were briefed about the changes to the state budget which original bill was rejected by the opposition in December. The revised bill was expected to be approved by cabinet and submitted to Parliament, which plans

to discuss it on January 18th, 2021. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 8th, President Nicos Anastasiades, will receive the special envoy of the UN Secretary-General, Jane Holl Lute, at the Presidential Palace on Monday morning, it was announced on Friday. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 9th, while UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres intends to invite all sides to a five-plus-one conference to explore if common ground exists to negotiate a solution to the Cyprus problem, in his latest report he commented on the skepticism on both sides over prospects for a return to peace talks. Guterres made clear that “time is working against a mutually acceptable political settlement in Cyprus.” (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

It seems that the UN has been activated for a new effort on the “Cypriot question.” The UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres said that it is time for an informal meeting between the two Cypriot communities and the guarantor countries. President Nikos Anastasiades speaks for a solution on the basis of a bizonal, bicomunal federation, while the Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar is in favor of two sovereign states. It is obvious that the two parts are moving in different directions, but if negotiations and dialogue will start none could exclude a potential solution. However, it seems that both sides are not very keen on talks currently. One should take into consideration the energy resources dimension which may force all parts to be more productive and consensual. Tension in the region has backed down recently and this apparent de-

escalation might relate to Turkish turn for starting dialogue with Greece too. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. It is determined to establish its presence in the region and especially within Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claiming the Turkish Cypriot community rights. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize) and it reinforce it with modern systems such as UAVs. 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 4th, newly appointed Greek Government Spokesman Christos Tarantilis announced the makeup of the Government on Monday, following a reshuffle by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis that saw most key Ministers stay put. Among the key changes made on Monday were the transfer of Kostis Hadzidakis from the Energy and Environment Ministry to the head of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, replacing Yiannis Vrotsis. His post as energy Minister will be filled by MP Kostas Skrekas. Makis Voridis was given the Interior Ministry portfolio, with Government Spokesman Stelios Petsas becoming his deputy, while MP Spilios Livanos takes over from Voridis at the Agriculture Ministry. The new cabinet will be sworn in on Tuesday. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 4th, January is expected to be a month of developments in Greek - Turkish relations, with Athens reportedly eyeing a possible restart of exploratory talks with Ankara.

- January 5th, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz on Tuesday hailed a 1.68 billion dollars defense agreement with Greece as a reflection of “*excellent and developing relations*” between the two countries. The agreement foresees the establishment of a flight academy for the Hellenic Air Force that will be built and operated by Israel’s Elbit Systems, the procurement of 10 M-346 aircraft and maintenance of T-6 aircraft, as well as the provision of simulators, training and logistic support, the Israeli Defense Ministry said on Tuesday, hailing it as the “*biggest defense agreement between Israel and Greece.*” (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 8th, the incident on Wednesday morning involving a Hellenic Coast Guard patrol boat that was rammed by a Turkish vessel near the uninhabited Imia islets was seen to be connected to the so-called “*bream war*” in an area whose Greek sovereignty is disputed by Turkey. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 9th, Greece’s Government has submitted a bill to Parliament to extend the western limit of its territorial waters in the Ionian Sea to 12 nautical miles, following negotiations with its regional neighbors Italy and Albania. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

The Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis reshuffled the Government seeking not only to boost its performance but also to maintain internal balance between moderates, conservatives and hardliners. Needless to say that the Government enjoys public acceptance due to its successful stance and reaction to consecutive Turkish crisis and provocations in the Aegean Sea

and Evros and the effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In foreign policy Greece is ready for exploratory talks with Turkey which has withdrawn its research vessels from the Greek waters aiming to send tangible messages to Europe and US that is de-escalating tension in the region. However, Greece forwards an ambitious armament project seeking to strengthen the operational capability of its Armed Forces and maintain balance of power with Turkey. The Government has brought in the Parliament the bill for approving the purchase of 18 fourth generation’s RAFALE fighter jets seeking to maintain air superiority in the region’s skies. Moreover, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has submitted to the Parliament the bill on extension of Greek territorial waters in the western borders of the country from 6 to 12 nautical miles; a significant step on delimitation of maritime zones. Although the case has been resolved with Italy there are still some open issues with Albania which it seems that is influenced by Turkey. The close Greek – Israeli cooperation has been concluded with a significant military agreement worth of 1.68 billion dollars. It is notable that the Greek airbase in Kalamata, south Greece will be upgraded into an international air training center operated by Israelis while 10 Israeli M-346 training aircrafts will be purchased by Greece. Of course Greece is benefited by the upgrade of its air training capabilities but Israel is getting access in an airbase achieving the much wanted air strategic depth.



KOSOVO: January 6th, Kosovo will hold snap parliamentary elections on February 14th, 2021 after the Constitutional Court ruled last month that the parliamentary confirmation of its

Government in June 2019 was illegal and the country must hold a fresh general election. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 6th, a day after the Parliament of Kosovo unanimous vote to allow the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) to partner with the US Army on future international peacekeeping missions, country's acting President Vjosa Osmani has signed a decree on authorizing sending a KSF contingent in peacekeeping missions abroad, Gazeta Express reported. (www.gazeta-express.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo has entered in a new phase of its long political instability and uncertainty. The acting President, Vjosa Osmani has called snap elections for February 14th, 2021 following the Constitutional Court's decision that the Hoti's Government confidence vote was not legal. So, Kosovo's Government collapses once again confirming the long and deep political crisis. The EU is pushing Belgrade and Pristina to restart dialogue in the new year seeking to continue what has started in 2020 and a final agreement to be reached Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish rule of law and modern functional administration. Moreover, corruption, organized crime, links between politicians and organized crime and inadequate justice system together with Kosovo unresolved status are significant obstacles towards the establishment of rule of law allowing Pristina to move ahead in its Euro-Atlantic path.



MOLDOVA: January 4th, the President of Moldova Maia Sandu will pay an

official visit to Ukraine on January 12th, 2021. While in Kiev, she will have an official meeting with her Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky, IPN reported. The presidential press service said Maia Sandu will also meet with the Prime Minister of Ukraine Denis Shmygal and the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Dmytro Razumkov. (www.ipn.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Election of Maia Sandu as the new President of Moldova has caused chain reactions in state's politics. The Government's resignation and refusal of the outgoing Prime Minister, Ion Chicu and his Ministers to remain in power as an interim Government has caused a political crisis with institutional and constitutional aspects. Following consultations with all political parties Sandu failed to reach a solution or an agreement for establishing an interim Government until the early parliamentary elections. However, she claimed that she has a sustainable plan for overcoming current political crisis. It should be highlighted that resignation of Chicu's Government amid the COVID-19 pandemic and an ongoing economic crisis could further deteriorate citizens' situation. Sandu will decide on the snap elections date which it might end current political crisis. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: January 4th, the President of Montenegro, **Milo Djukanovic**, has announced today that he will not issue a decree on the recall of seven Ambassadors because he believes that the conditions for its adoption have not been met. He requires further explanation

from the Government as of why the Montenegrin Ambassadors are being recalled. (www.cdm.me)

- January 4th, Montenegrin Deputy Prime Minister Dritan Abazovic denied in an interview to NewsMax Adria claims that the country's new Government is pro-Serbian and anti-Montenegrin, adding that those claims prove that any cabinet official is on the side of the former authorities. He said that the reform of the security services is a priority as a lesson learned from the October 5th, 2000 changes in Serbia (when the Milosevic regime was toppled) to prevent what he called "a black scenario" as in Serbia. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The central political issue in Montenegro is cooperation and coexistence of the new Government and the President, Milo Djukanovic. The latter is trying to block the Government's decisions and any legislative initiative. Djukanovic in the thirty years of power has established a suitable political system and administration for strengthening his competences. Consequently, the biggest challenge for the new Government is to promote and implement its reforms within a hostile political environment. That is why the Deputy Prime Minister, Dritan Abazovic stated that reforms should start from the security sector; a sensitive and critical sector for the Government's stability. The new Government publically declares that it is not a pro-Serbian or pro-Russian political formation but signs cannot be hidden. The Prime Minister, Zdravko Krivokapic congratulated (he claimed it did it unofficially!) Republika Srpska for its national day (declared as unconstitutional by the Bosnia & Herzegovina's Constitutional Court) frustrating

the other two entities of the neighboring countries. Abazovic said that Montenegrin – Serbian relation should restart from "zero point." The western international community is closely monitoring the Montenegrin ruling majority especially in the field of foreign policy orientation. Montenegro needs 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. It is assessed that Russian attempts for influencing the small country will strengthen in near future and this could activate reflexes of NATO.



NORTH MACEDONIA: January 4th, according to the Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev "census is sorely needed" in the country and in his opinion it will be organized from April 1st to April 21st, 2021. (www.meta.mk)

- January 8th, "Portugal will be interested to resume Germany's efforts and Berlin has said it will remain committed to this issue. I think the EU cannot afford 2021 to be like 2020 with enlargement failure," Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, Nikola Dimitrov, tells MIA in an interview (www.mia.mk)

- January 10th, this week, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Bujar Osmani had a communication with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, Ekaterina Zaharieva, during which it was agreed to exchange proposals from both sides for the Action Plan in the coming days. (www.mia.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Zoran Zaev's Government has to overcome the challenge of Bulgaria which has blocked the opening of accession talks between the EU and North Macedonia due to historic, language and identity disputes. Zaev was seeking to start talks in the second half of 2020 but Bulgaria did not allow it. Now North Macedonia cherishes hopes for the first half of 2021. Taking this into consideration, the country is intensifying its efforts to reach an agreement with Bulgaria and overcome the latter's objections. Census is another important issue for the state. Currently the country does not have a clean picture of its population since last census took place back in 2002. Since then census was almost a forbidden idea due to nationalist interests. More specifically, Macedonians are (or was) reluctant because they afraid of ethnic Albanian current population. According to the Ohrid Agreement if Albanians are more than 20% of the country's population then they will enjoy certain advanced rights. However, Zaev appears determined to organize a reliable census in the first half of 2021 and more specifically from April 1st to April 21st, 2021.



ROMANIA: January 6th, Prime Minister Florin Citu declared on Wednesday that the Executive has begun to prepare the state budget for 2021 and that the proposal is for the budget to be voted in Parliament on February 4th, 2021. (www.nineoclock.ro)

- January 6th, several MQ-9 Reaper aircraft and approximately 90 airmen of the US Air Force have been deployed to the Campia Turzii Air Base in Romania, where they will conduct intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance

missions in support of NATO operations. (www.romania-insider.com)



MQ-9A "REAPER" (Italian Air Force)

(Photo Source: www.ga-asi.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The newly elected ruling coalition has several challenges ahead to deal with. Currently, the state's budget of 2021 is the issue should be resolved. According to the Prime Minister, Florin Citu the budget's bill will be introduced to the Parliament in early February (February 4th, 2021). The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO. In this context the US Armed Forces have deployed a number of MQ-9 drones in a Romanian air base for surveillance and reconnaissance missions. After redeployment of the US military forces from Germany, Romania is upgrading into the advanced bastion of NATO against 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.



SERBIA: January 6th, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said on Wednesday that he is sure that foreigners were involved in wire-tapping his conversations, adding that the people he was recorded talking to have nothing to do with drug trafficking. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 6th, the EU's Ambassador in Serbia Sem Fabrizi said on Wednesday that Serbia could open more chapters in its pre-accession talks during 2021 if it implements the recommendations in the latest European Commission report. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 8th, Belgrade will remain a “reliable supporter of Republika Srpska, in all its efforts towards peace, general welfare and a better life for all of us,” Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic has said on Friday in a congratulatory message to RS' President Zeljka Cvijanovic ahead of the entity's Day on May 9th. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 10th, Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said there are already two “exceptionally strong” candidates for the presidential election 2022, expressing a belief that one of them will come out as the election winner. Those candidates are current deputy leader of the Party of Freedom and Justice (Stranka Slobode i Pravde - SSP) Marinika Tepic and Serbian Orthodox bishop Grigorije. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The country enjoys a stable Government despite opposition complaints and protests. However, one should not ignore that the ruling majority has shown signs of autocratic practices putting at risk

freedom of expression and human rights. Serbian Government should focus on implementing reforms in justice, economy, corruption and organized crime for opening new chapters in the accession process with the EU. The country enjoys an upgrade in its regional influence after the political change in Montenegro where a pro-Serbian Government has been established. Kosovo – Serbia dialogue is on hold after political instability in Pristina and the early elections scheduled for February 14th, 2021. Much pressure is expected from the EU and US towards Serbia in 2021 for reaching a final agreement with Kosovo including mutual recognition and normalization of relations between the two parts. 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 4th, the Finance Ministry announced that a new, 10-year bond with maturity in 2031 will be issued in the near future and the existing 30-year bond issue due in 2050 increased, depending on the situation on financial markets. Barclays, BNP Paribas, Credit Agricole CIB, Deutsche Bank, HSBC and Slovenia's NKBM have been authorized to manage the debt issue. (www.sta.si)

- January 5th, Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS) leader Karl Erjavec, tipped for a Prime Minister-designate, announced the informal coalition of five centre-left opposition parties would file a motion of no-confidence in the Janez Jansa Government on January 15th,

2021. The parties, associated in the Constitutional Arch Coalition (KUL), have 43 votes between them, three short of the majority needed for the vote to succeed. He nevertheless expects the 46 votes in the secret ballot in Parliament to elect a new PM-designate, mostly counting on MPs from the coalition Modern Centre Party (Stranka Modernega Centra - SMC). (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Janez Jansa Government enjoys relative stability although opposition DeSUS is planning to file a motion of no confidence against the ruling majority. It is assessed that the Government will maintain its majority in the Parliament if opposition will submit its motion eventually. The issue of illegal migration keeps on being a "headache" for state's authorities and security forces. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. Their operational readiness is under question and it is assessed that they cannot accomplish their mission.



TURKEY: January 4th, Turkey's Foreign Ministry has welcomed the end of the three-year Gulf crisis, which saw severe deterioration in Saudi -Qatar ties. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 5th, some 150 Somali army soldiers are receiving special commando training in Turkey under a military cooperation pact between the two countries, the Turkish National Defense Ministry said on Tuesday. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 6th, Turkey on Tuesday once again called on Greece to resolve the disputes between

the two countries in the Eastern Mediterranean and hold exploratory as well as de-confliction talks. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 6th, the post-Brexit trade deal between Turkey and the United Kingdom has safeguarded 25 billion dollars worth of business between the nations that find themselves two of the largest economies on the fringes of the EU. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan described it as "the most important trade deal" since Ankara signed a customs union with the EU in 1995, while the UK's International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said it would lead to a "new, more ambitious deal with Turkey in the near future." (www.aljazeera.com)

- January 8th, Turkey is working to turn the page in its relations with the EU, the country's Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu said Friday. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 10th, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar on Sunday met with his Libyan counterpart Salah Eddine al-Namrush in Istanbul within the scope of efforts to enhance and strengthen bilateral cooperation, the Turkish Defense Ministry stated. According to the ministry's written statement, Akar reiterated Turkey's support for the U.N.-recognized Government of National Accord's (GNA) efforts for a political solution in the country. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey is showing signs of de-escalation of tension in Eastern Mediterranean and start of dialogue with Greece. Apart from that, Turkey is changing its stance towards the EU by claiming on highest levels of power that the country seeks

to accelerate its process towards accession to the Union. It is assessed that election of Joe Biden as the new US President and the threat of sanctions by the EU on the March summit could have changed the Turkish stance. Besides, Turkish foreign policy is remarkably adaptable to political changes seeking to take advantage of any new situation! In this context, Turkey expressed once again its readiness for exploratory talks with Greece. However, it maintains low scale tension in the Aegean Sea with naval exercises, violations of Greek airspace and provocative rhetoric. It is certain that Turkey is not willing to abolish any of its vital interests in Eastern Mediterranean Sea. It continues its active presence with both, diplomatic and military assets in Libya, Syria, Somalia, Azerbaijan and several other countries in Africa. It has achieved to become part of the problem and part of the solution in the Libyan, Nagorno Karabakh and Syrian front having a say in political and security developments. De-escalation of tension between Saudi Arabia and Qatar it was a negative change for Turkey since it is losing its critical role in supporting Qatar. In the Cypriot front, Turkey promotes the solution of two sovereign states seeking to divide the island. 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. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it

will set the base to become a regional military super power.

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NOTE

-  *Stable situation. No security risk.*
-  *Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.*
-  *Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions. Low tension incidents.*
-  *Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. Violent incidents or armed violence in specific regions. Ongoing tension or crisis. High security risk.*
-  *Evolving or ongoing crisis including major armed violence or violent/armed conflict. Civil, inter-state or non –state actors war.*