



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE

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

Copyright © 2019

“HERMES” Institute for Foreign Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy

All rights reserved



ALBANIA: December 3rd, the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, responded to the 3-point plan of the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD), Lulzim Basha, as regards his propositions for leaving behind the emergency situation. After commenting on his plan with irony, Rama invited Basha to be part of a joint table. *“Opposition claims to govern the country. Not only have they not agreed to sit and discuss anything, for which we are ready to accept their ideas if they are better than ours, but they have given us three points which are just food for laughs in days that start with tears,”* Rama said, regarding the PD’s first point of the three-point plan, which is to have 500 engineers ready to discuss situation. The Prime Minister declared that the second point on the PD proposition, that of verifying the damage with the engineers, is already being done in cooperation with the international partners, which are so many in this neighborhood of Durres that it seems like a UN meeting. The third point, according to Rama, it would mean stopping the free basic healthcare. (www.top-channel.tv)

- December 5th, the Albanian Parliament elected on Thursday Olsi Cela as the new Prosecutor General. The majority and new opposition in Parliament joined the vote and with 101 votes in favor, two against and ten abstentions, Cela was approved as the new Prosecutor General. He took his oath in Parliament at the end of Thursday’s plenary session. Meanwhile, Cela was present in the Parliament lodge, where he closely followed the vote. Arta Marku, the temporary Prosecutor General since December 2017, received 11 votes in favor, 22 against, 78 abstentions, while two members did not vote. Fatjona Memcaj received

eight votes in favor, six against, 87 abstentions and three did not vote. In an interview for more than 60 minutes in front of the High Prosecutorial Council on November 13th, 2019 Cela stated, among other things, that justice has been harsh with the poor. According to him, this should not happen, as it creates serious social problems. *“By deepening social problems, we are preparing young generations who are on the streets today and have no future and who are tomorrow’s criminals,”* Cela said. (www.tiranatimes.com)

- December 8th, Albania officially took over on Friday the forthcoming presidency of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), an organization comprised of 57 member states, which it will lead throughout 2020. The next OSCE Chairman will be Prime Minister Edi Rama, but this time in his capacity as Albania’s Foreign Minister. It was Rama who delivered the speech today, at the close of the ministerial organized in the Slovak capital, which held the presidency throughout 2019. Rama outlined what the priorities of Albania’s chairmanship will be, starting from honoring the commitments of the member states, promoting the work of the OSCE closer to the people and strengthening the dialogue *“as the only way to build trust towards each other.”* Rama did not leave unmentioned the crisis in Ukraine, which he said *“remains the most pressing security challenge in Europe. It is unacceptable that prolonged conflicts in the OSCE region continue to claim lives. Therefore, efforts for resolving the conflict will be at the top of the agenda for the Albanian Presidency,”* he said. Rama ended his speech by stressing the need for compromise and urging member countries to engage constructively, open-minded and without

forgetting that everything is done for the people.
(www.tiranatimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

While Albania heals its wounds from the deadly earthquake, political parties fight each other over the dead bodies and ruins. This natural disaster will definitely affect the ruling PS and the Prime Minister, Edi Rama. Political crisis is ongoing creating an uncertain and unstable political situation. It is assessed that the country moves rapidly towards early parliamentary elections since it is estimated that Rama will hardly remain in power. Albania took over the chairmanship of OSCE and it is considered as a great opportunity for the country to gain international recognition and respect. Reforms should continue more intensively if the state seeks to get an accession negotiation date with the EU. Corruption, organized crime, money laundering, drug and weapon smuggling and links between politics and organized crime are the main problems Albania should address effectively. Relation between Albania and Kosovo with its newly elected Government under Albin Kurti as the Prime Minister is a good question. Lately, Rama took some distance from Kurti's statements for a united Albanian nation.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

December 6th, Bosnia's judicial overseer, the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, must be reformed, experts argued after a report of the European Commission said the country's judiciary was in crisis and unable to cope with serious crime and corruption cases. Experts told Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) that action must be taken after legal expert

Reinhard Priebe's highly critical report for the European Commission said that Bosnia and Herzegovina must reform its dysfunctional justice system and reduce political pressures on the judiciary. State Judge Branko Peric argued that the current members of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, Bosnia's judicial overseer, should be replaced in order "to bring in other people who will restore citizens' confidence in that institution through their actions, moral integrity and professionalism. I am not very optimistic, but something will have to be changed. These are tasks for the political sphere." The Priebe report, published on Thursday, said that the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council "is often perceived by citizens and even by members of the judicial community as a centre of unaccountable power in the hands of people serving the interests of a network of political patronage and influence." A positive rule-of-law assessment from the European Commission is crucial to Bosnia and Herzegovina's hopes of progressing towards EU membership. But Peric suggested that situation was even worse than the report claims. "That is not just about corruption, but the complete ineffectiveness of the system and prosecution policy, because judiciary today is dealing with 'petty' crimes instead of a grave," he said. The Chief of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, Milan Tegeltija, claimed that politicians, intelligence agents and the media were responsible for the report's negative conclusions. He said that Priebe, although trying to be objective, could not "totally neglect the forced, political, channeled media pressure." Goran Nezirovic, a member of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, said however that it was "crucial that all relevant domestic actors immediately commit to honestly implementing the

recommendations and reform measures and improving the justice situation.” (www.balkaninsight.com)

- December 6th, Zoran Tegeltija, whose appointment as Chairman of the BiH Council of Ministers was confirmed on Thursday in the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliament, announced that he will begin consultations with the future constituent coalition parties on future Ministers. Consultation started on Friday and will be resumed on Monday, December 9th, 2019. He expressed the expectation that the ministerial appointment process would be completed by the end of this month. *“As far as I am informed, there are two indicative dates for the work of Parliament by the end of this year, which are December 18th and 23rd. As far as I am concerned, I will be ready for any of these sessions,”* Tegeltija said. He expressed his expectation that he would carry out the necessary consultations by mid-next week. *“I expect the parties to submit the candidates’ proposals, because it takes some time to complete all checks,”* Tegeltija said. He estimated that the names of candidates for Ministers and Deputy Ministers were already more or less known within political parties. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- December 6th, the return of Bosnian nationals from the camps in Syria, initially scheduled for this Saturday, has been postponed, the Security Ministry, Dragan Mektic said Friday afternoon. Acting upon the conclusions of the State Presidency and the Council of Ministers, the Security Ministry carried out the necessary preparations to accept the first group of Bosnian nationals consisting of women and children but due to, what the Ministry called, sudden and unanticipated circumstances, the return has been

postponed. The Ministry continues its communication with the international partners in order to ensure a safe return of Bosnian nationals from Syria as soon as necessary conditions are met. Mektic said earlier this week that the Presidency made a *“shocking”* decision on the return of Bosnians from camps Syria and Iraq, noting that the collective Head of state had to consult security agencies before it passed the decision. *“I do not know if they consulted any security agency before, and they had to contact the Ministry about having decided to return so many people to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been announced for Saturday,”* Mektic told N1. *“There are many people that we know nothing about, there are women, children, ISIS fighters,”* he said. *“By doing that, the Presidency jeopardized safety in this country. We do not know who these people are or what they were doing,”* he concluded. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The new Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Zoran Tegeltija is working for forming the new Government. The country is on the path of political normality by getting a new Government after more than a year of the last parliamentary elections (October 7th, 2018). State institutions will become functional again allowing the country to move forward with major reforms and economic growth. Besides, the EU Commission released a report warning for deteriorating judicial system in Bosnia. Political situation in the country remains alarming and at the moment it is considered as a potential source of instability in the region. It is not a secret that all entities question the Dayton Peace Agreement aiming to set their own political agenda. Neighboring

Croatia and Serbia keep on intervening in Bosnia's internal affairs, while Muslim countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran maintain a permanent presence through financial donations and investments. Russia tries to "penetrate" in Bosnian affairs maintaining its influence in Southeastern Europe. Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust blocking any attempt for economic growth and major reforms. EU path is too long for Bosnia and only for geopolitical interests it could have chances entering the EU.



BULGARIA: December 4th,

Bulgaria's Cabinet announced that it has approved an additional 16 million leva (about 8.2 million euro) to ensure the airworthiness of MiG-29 fighter jets used by the country's Air Force. The Government statement gave no further details about the allocation, but Prime Minister Boyko Borissov told reporters after the weekly Cabinet sitting that the funds would be used to replace engines on eight jets. *"Sixteen million leva for eight jets, until the F-16s arrive, to replace their engines so that our pilots can carry out their duties and be safe,"* Borissov said, as quoted by public broadcaster Bulgarian National Television. Several reports in Bulgarian media said that the funding was under the framework agreement approved last year, meant to ensure the airworthiness of the MiG-29s in order for Bulgaria to carry out its air policing tasks as part of NATO duties. This summer, Bulgaria signed contracts to buy eight F-16 Block 70 fighter jets from Lockheed Martin for a total of 1.256 billion dollars, but the first jet is expected to be delivered

in late-2022. Until that point, Bulgaria will continue to use its Soviet-era MiG fighter jets. (www.sofiaglobe.com)



MIG 29, of the Bulgarian Air Force

(Photo source: www.airforce.mod.bg)

- December 4th, meeting of the state and Government leaders of NATO member states in London provides Bulgaria the opportunity to strengthen its position as a factor of stability in Southeastern Europe and defend its national interest. This is what President Rumen Radev told journalists today before leaving for the NATO summit in London. The top-level forum in the British capital will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Alliance, the presidential press office reported. *"Bulgaria should not miss the historical opportunity to protect the Republic of North Macedonia's air space,"* the Head of State said. In his words, while talks in this direction were postponed by the Bulgarian side for the *"bright future,"* when we will have a squadron of new aircrafts, Greece signed an agreement on this mission. *"The current opportunities have given us the chance to fully perform this task without any extra expenditure because the Graf Ignatievo Air Base has been tasked this mission,"* Radev said. The President recalled his meetings with Prime Ministers Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Zoran Zaev in the past

months, at which an agreement was reached for holding a meeting between Bulgaria's Defense Minister and Chief of Defense with their counterparts from Greece and North Macedonia for including Bulgaria in the protection of the air space of North Macedonia. *"This not only serves our national interest, but it is also our duty to the fraternal Republic of North Macedonia and is an expression of responsibility,"* the Head of State said. Asked to comment the topics discussed at the talks the Bulgarian Prime Minister held in the US concerning the increased presence of the NATO forces in the Black Sea region and creating a naval coordination center in Varna, Radev said that when such topics are discussed and announced, it is essential that precise terminology be used. *"This is neither a base, nor a logistic support. Decisions are made neither in Washington nor in London; they are made in the NATO headquarters in Brussels. Bulgaria has long voiced its position,"* the President added. (www.novinite.com)

- December 6th, Bulgaria's National Assembly voted to ratify a contract to buy two second-hand minesweepers from the Netherlands. The value of the purchase and delivery contract is almost two million euro. The contract was signed on November 7th, 2019. Plamen Manushev, an MP of Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Grazhdani za Evropeysko Razvitie na Bŭlgaria – GERB), the majority partner in Government, said that the ships would be for operations in the Black Sea. *"Our Navy has a serious and urgent need to replace its anti-mine forces, because the ones we have are Soviet-made minesweepers already at the end of their lifecycle,"* Manushev said. On November 6th, 2019 when the Cabinet approved the contract, a Government statement said that the

purchase would serve towards the safety of navigation in Bulgarian waters in peacetime and help the country fulfill its obligations in wartime, at national level and at Allied level as part of the EU and NATO. The Netherlands Navy is undergoing a series of changes. Of its Alkmaar-class minesweepers, it has sold some to Latvia and decommissioned others, while it currently has six. Bulgaria's military modernization plans also include acquisition of two naval patrol vessels, to replace three Soviet-made patrol vessels that have become impractical to operate because of lack of spare parts and incompatibility with NATO standards. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

Boyko Borissov Government is stable. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively. The country pays special attention to energy security developing several projects. 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: December 2nd, after Croatia, along with some other NATO countries, was told by the US and NATO in Brussels in October to come up with a plan in six weeks on how to set aside 2% of its GDP for defense, Defense Minister Damir Krsticevic has told Vecernji List daily of Monday that an action plan has been drawn up. *"Croatia will be in the green,"* he said. Krsticevic and Prime Minister Andrej

Plenkovic are going to London for a NATO summit on December 3rd – 4th, 2019 and on that occasion they will undertake the commitment that Croatia will be able to set aside said 2% by 2024, when it is estimated that its annual defense budget will be 9.4 billion kuna (almost 4.8 billion euro). Croatia spends today about 6.7 billion Kuna (almost 3.4 billion euro) on defense, so a 40% increase must be achieved by 2024. According to NATO, Croatia must invest more in defense and a lot more in the equipment and modernization of its Armed Forces. Although, thanks to a new NATO methodology, Croatia now sets aside 1.68% of GDP on defense, this amount (6.7 billion kuna) includes veterans' pensions, which means that only 5 billion kuna is spent annually on the active Armed Forces. When salaries are added to pensions, it turns out that Croatia spends 73% of its defense budget on personnel. Consequently, much less is spent on equipment and modernization Vecernji List reported. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- December 4th, Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske - SDP) parliamentary whip Arsen Bauk said on Wednesday that his party would start collecting signatures for a motion for a vote of no confidence against Education Minister Blazenko Divjak, whom the SDP considers the most responsible, together with Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, for current situation in the education system. *“We plan to start collecting the signatures today so that we can collect (the required number of) signatures for the no-confidence motion to be tabled during the ongoing regular session, which ends on December 15th,”* Bauk told the press. SDP will collect signatures primarily from the opposition

parties that support SDP's presidential candidate, Zoran Milanovic, and according to Bauk, this is not so because of Milanovic but because of political orientation. Under the parliament's rule book, a motion for a no-confidence vote can be tabled to the Parliament if it is supported by signatures of at least a fifth of lawmakers, that is, 31 MPs. After the motion is added to the Parliament's agenda, the Government is supposed to give its opinion about it within eight days, and a parliamentary debate is to be conducted within 30 days after the submission of the Government's opinion. Milorad Batinic, the parliamentary whip of the Croatian People's Party (Hrvatska Narodna Stranka - HNS), which nominated Divjak, said today that the SDP's proposal signalled *“a lack of ideas and content in the SDP's activities in the last two years.”* The HNS parliamentarian said he was not afraid of the reaction of the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica - HDZ), the senior partner in the ruling coalition, to the SDP proposal. Batinic does not think that Prime Minister Plenkovic will dismiss Divjak whom he described as *“one of the most successful Ministers. There are no objective reasons for that to happen. I am confident that Prime Minister Plenkovic will support her. She is a member of his cabinet, after all,”* the HNS MP said. Asked by the press whether the Education Minister should be considered guilty for the recent 36-day strike of teachers, Batinic dismissed any responsibility on Divjak's part. (www.hr.n1info.com)

December 5th, an annex to the Basic Collective Agreement for public servants and a wage supplement agreement for education sector employees was signed in Government House on Thursday. The annex to the Basic Collective

Agreement for public servants was signed by Labor and Pension System Minister Josip Aladrovic and representatives of nine trade unions. *“After a long period of time we have decided to sign the annex to the Basic Collective Agreement and we must express our satisfaction. The negotiations were not simple, they were demanding, however we did find a compromise solution. We have accepted it so that our people, after a certain number of years, could have higher base pay next year,”* Anica Prasnjak said, President of the nurses' union. The wage supplement agreement for education sector employees was signed by Science and Education Minister Blazanka Divjak and education union representatives. Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said his Government has shown that it has continued to implement its consistent policy of increasing salaries through the base pay and annexes to the Basic Collective Agreement. *“During this Government's term, salaries in state administration and public services will have gone up 18.3% by October 2020,”* Plenkovic said.

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The country enjoys political stability, while it is moving ahead for the presidential elections, scheduled on December 22nd, 2019 (first round) and January 5th, 2020 (second round if necessary). It seems that a social unrest is ongoing with worker's unions (mainly teachers) to push the Government for further increase in salaries. It is assessed that Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic forced to compromise and to sign agreements with the unions for salaries increase under the burden of the coming elections. Croatia received a positive recommendation by the European Commission for implementing all

necessary criteria for entering the Schengen Zone. However, the final political decision by the member states requires a unanimous vote and it is expected to become a field of confrontation between Croatia and Slovenia. Slovenia has already expressed its intention to block Croatia's accession to the Schengen Area due to their border dispute. However, Croatia expresses confidence that finally it will get full support (Slovenia including) for entering the Zone. However, Croatia insists on claiming that the arbitration rule is not valid and the dispute should be resolved through bilateral negotiations; a position which is unacceptable for Slovenia. Croatia implements a hard-line foreign policy with its neighboring countries maintaining open disputes with Bosnia, Slovenia, and Serbia. Top officials do not hesitate to openly interfere in Bosnian domestic affairs in the name of Bosnian Croats. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards. Failure to complete successfully the purchase of a modern fighter jet maintains a long period of an ineffective and weak Croatian Air Force.



CYPRUS: December 4th, President Nicos Anastasiades informed the National Council on Wednesday night about his meeting with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci in Berlin last week, Deputy Government Spokesman Panayiotis Sentonas said. *“The meeting was held in a constructive climate. During the meeting, the President informed the member of the National Council about the meeting in Berlin in detail,”* said Sentonas. He added the President reiterated

his *'true willingness'* and the decisiveness of the Greek Cypriot side to restart negotiations. The political party leaders did not comment on the meeting. Last week, in the German capital, the UN chief announced he would continue efforts to achieve a baseline to serve *"as a consensus starting point for phased, meaningful, and results-oriented negotiations at the earliest feasible opportunity."* He also committed to explore with the two leaders and the guarantor powers the possibility of convening an informal five-plus-UN meeting at an appropriate stage. Earlier in the evening on Wednesday, Akinci also informed the Turkish Cypriot parties about the results of the Berlin meeting. Akinci said a five-party meeting with the guarantors is not expected to be held soon due to the *'elections'* in the north, the elections in the UK, and because Turkey has rejected any such conference. Ahead of the Berlin talks, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Turkey was not prepared to negotiate under the current conditions. *"We will not sit at the negotiating table again just for the sake of negotiating,"* he said. The Turkish Foreign Minister added that they have told their interlocutors that before a new negotiating procedure can start *"all vagueness regarding political equality between the two sides must first be clarified."* (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- December 6th, Foreign Affairs Minister Nikos Christodoulides called on Turkey to accept Cyprus' invitation to settle their differences at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague. Speaking to state broadcaster CyBC on the legal recourse sought by Cyprus at the ICJ against Turkey over violations of the island's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) the Minister said to file unilaterally and invite Turkey to respond was the

only choice they had. Christodoulides explained that because Turkey has not accepted the mandatory procedure to be followed at the ICJ, the Government had to send last month a note verbale to Turkey's Embassy in Athens for an agreement for the two sides to go to Court to delimit their sea zones in the north and northwest. After there was no response, the note was sent by fax, he said. He admitted that without Turkey giving her consent, *"the case cannot proceed."* He added however that there had been similar cases in the past when countries filed unilaterally and other states concerned that did not initially accept, later did. *"Exactly the same case like Turkey. States that did not accept the mandatory Court procedure but following the unilateral appeal by other states, agreed to enter this process,"* he said. Since Turkey is constantly declaring their actions are based on international law, and since it does not want to enter into a bilateral procedure with the Republic, since it does not recognise it, *"then come, let's go to the ICJ to solve our differences,"* the Minister said. Democratic Party (Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα - DIKO) welcomed the Government's move arguing that it has always believed that international law was Cyprus' most powerful weapon. The party's leader, Nicolas Papadopoulos told CyBC that most probably Turkey would not cooperate but Cyprus ought to take this step, regardless. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- December 8th, the only way for Cyprus to have a future is through an honest compromise envisaged by the agreed framework for a solution, opposition Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού - ΑΚΕΛ) leader Andros Kyprianou said on Sunday. Speaking at a memorial service for an EOKA hero, Kyprianou said the two leaders must behave

consistently and decisively, take initiatives and address the people with sincerity. “*We do not want, and will not resign ourselves to the occupation,*” he said. “*What we seek is a fair compromise with our Turkish Cypriot compatriots. We want the next generations to live in our country peacefully, in a secure environment, with their human rights and fundamental freedoms safeguarded. Cyprus would be saved if a solution could be reached that will free the island of the Turkish occupation and guarantee the fundamental freedoms of all Cypriot citizens,*” Kyprianou said. According to him, AKEL welcomed the fact that during the meeting the two leaders had in Berlin last month with the UN Secretary-General, the basis of a solution as previously agreed was reaffirmed. “*This was the best response to all those who flirted with other ideas,*” said Kyprianou adding “*Because of that, two and a half precious years have been lost from Crans-Montana until today.*” He called on the two leaders to consistently and decisively, take initiatives and address people with sincerity. “*The world is tired of disappointment,*” he emphasized. He also said Turkey had a specific goal and that was to achieve the partition of Cyprus “*so our goal should be the liberation and reunification of Cyprus,*” he added. “*We will only achieve this when we succeed in resolving the Cyprus issue on the basis of an agreed framework. If this is not possible, then it should be clear to everyone and in the international community, that the responsibility will not lie with us but only with Turkey,*” he said. The road would be very difficult and “*will not be paved with rose petals,*” Kyprianou said. “*But that it is a road we need to walk if we want to justify the sacrifices of our heroes,*” he concluded. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Cypriot administration and political forces continue to evaluate results of the tripartite meeting of UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, the Cypriot President, Nicos Anastasiades and the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, Mustafa Akinci in Berlin. Despite the meeting, there are little chances of a near future five-parties meeting between Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, UK, and the Turkish Cypriot community. Turkey continues its invasion in Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) with Yavuz drillship challenging the state’s sovereignty. Lack of military power and more specifically aeronautical power is critical for Turkish uncontrolled action within Cypriot EEZ. Cyprus continues to work by diplomatic means on resolving the crisis but the fact is that Turkey has consolidated its presence in the Cypriot waters (and this would be another “asset” during the negotiation process). Cyprus has presented lately a new proposal by inviting Turkey to settle their bilateral dispute in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). It is considered more or less as another diplomatic maneuver with little or zero possibilities to succeed. As long as tension remains in eastern Mediterranean, there is always a high risk of an armed “hot” incident or a conflict. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: December 4th, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Wednesday he discussed with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan “*all the issues*” that have recently increased tensions between the two countries during a meeting on the sidelines of NATO’s 70th birthday gathering in London. According to information, Mitsotakis told Erdogan that the Turkey - Libya deal they signed last week to delimitate maritime borders is legally void and complicates relations in a sensitive region. “*I presented all issues arising from the latest Turkish actions. Disagreements from both sides were noted. The two sides, however, agreed to continue discussions on the confidence-building measures of the Ministry of Defense,*” Mitsotakis told journalists after the meeting. He also said he has instructed Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias to convene Greece’s cross-party foreign policy council to inform opposition political leaders. “*I want to assure the Greek people that there have been, are and will continue to have difficulties in our relations with Turkey. But I think that, as long as both sides show good will, these can eventually be overcome,*” he added. The two sides also discuss migration, with the Greek Premier noting that Turkey appears to have shifted its position, as its Coast Guard does not respond to Greek requests to collect migrants and refugees from the sea. Mitsotakis, however, reiterated Greece’s support for the 2016 EU-Turkey statement which curbed migrant arrivals to the Greek islands. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- December 6th, more than forty people were detained and 10 were arrested in clashes between anarchists and Riot Police in Athens on Friday night, after the annual march to commemorate the

shooting of a school boy by a Policeman in 2008. Separate group of youngsters threw petrol bombs against Riot Police Officers in Athens streets, while other anarchists on Exarcheia square (it is considered as the “*base*” of anarchists) smashed marble slabs and threw the pieces against the Police. Hundreds of Officers and two water cannons are deployed in the area, along with a helicopter which is hovering over the district. Earlier, a group of anarchists hurled petrol bombs against Riot Police units stationed outside the headquarters of Greek Socialist Movement (Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα – PASOK). Officers responded with tear gas and the attackers retreated towards the local square. Police said about 5,000 people took part in an evening demonstration in the Greek capital that included members of anarchist and anti-establishment organizations, while earlier some 2,000 attended a midday rally organized by student groups. Four bus stops were smashed during the march. Similar scenes were repeated in the port city of Patras, in the northern Peloponnese, where protesters and Officers clashed after the main march which counted about 400 participants. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- December 8th, the Libyan - Turkish memorandum delineating common maritime boundaries in the Mediterranean is the product of Turkish blackmail to the embattled Libyan Government and is totally devoid of substance, Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias said Sunday. “*The Turkish move had been anticipated since July and a series of actions had been undertaken to prevent it,*” Dendias told TV station Ant1. “*Despite that, the Tripoli Government, blackmailed by Turkey, obviously because of the advances made by General Haftar(’s army) in*

recent days, signed the text,” he added. Field Marshal Khalifa Belqasim Haftar is the leader of the Libyan National Army, which is loyal to the so-called Tobruk Government that controls the eastern part of Libya and is engaged in a civil war against the UN-recognized Government of Libya based in Tripoli, the country's capital in the western part. Haftar's Army also has the support of the Libya House of Representatives, which has condemned the Libyan - Turkish memorandum. “Our country will prepared a note that will be submitted to the United Nations and will take all those measures in the framework of international law and the law of the seas that will demonstrate the invalidity (of the memorandum),” Dendias said. The Greek Foreign Minister also said that Greece and Egypt are already engaged in talks with a “tight timetable” to delineate their own Exclusive Economic Zones. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Greece enjoys political stability. The Government implemented a tide and effective security plan to address possible violent protests by anarchists during the November 17th commemoration of the violent protest against military junta back in 1974 and the December 6th commemoration of murder of a 15 year old boy by a Policeman in 2008. Taking into consideration that these two protests were sources of violence in Greek cities in the past it is assessed that the Ministry of Citizen's Protection and Police implemented a successful operational plan eliminating anarchists' activity and excessive destructions and violence. In fact, Police was always a step ahead towards anarchists which indicates effective intelligence system. It should be noted that Greece is one of

the last European countries faces domestic activity by left-ideology terrorists. At the moment, migration is the main security problem of Greece. Good weather contributes in maintenance of a stable flow from Turkish coasts towards Greek islands. Control of migrant flows coming from Turkey is a critical point for Greek national security and consequently EU's security. The Government announced strict measures aiming to control the problem but also seeks to the EU solidarity to address the problem. Greece initial surprise by the announcement of the Turkish – Libyan agreement on maritime boundaries was followed by diplomatic action. Greece denounced the memorandum in the UN and asked for support by the EU. It also cut ties with the UN recognized Government of Libya strengthening simultaneously its relations with General Haftar who fights for controlling power in Libya. The fact is that the new diplomatic developments in the region create a new complicated situation which may cause more tension between Greece and Turkey. Latest developments could be the forerunner of escalating tension between the two countries not only in Eastern Aegean Sea, mainly in the Kastelorizo island, south of Rhodes, but also in Eastern Mediterranean. Greece is concerned due to Turkish intention to search for hydrocarbons within its EEZ near to Kastelorizo region. The critical question is “how Greece would react if a Turkish drillship would appear in its territorial waters.” Turkey has targeted the wider area of Kastelorizo (and Northeast Aegean Sea) issuing several NAVTEXs for naval exercises with live fires. Moreover, Turkish fighter jets massively violate Greek airspace, while Turkish drones fly over Greek islands or islets. Turkey keeps upgrading provocations against Greece with a “hot” incident always to be in the

foreground. Besides, Greek – Turkish relations are in a critical point due to Turkey's decision to violate Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) aiming at conducting oil and gas drills, but also because Turkey maintains a hard rhetoric against Greece regarding its territorial and maritime sovereign rights. Greece seeks to modernize its Armed Forces by receiving US military aid. It is a fact that Greek military force has been affected by the long economic crisis threatening the balance of power with Turkey. Currently, Greece is in talks with France for purchasing two advanced frigates BELHARA. Taking into consideration the ongoing provocations in the Aegean Sea and the complicated current situation in Cypriot EEZ, security situation is of high risk due to an accidental or preplanned incident by Turkey.



KOSOVO: December 5th, the Kosovo Serb List (Srpska Lista) said on Thursday that it would walk out of all Kosovo institutions if the conviction of its official Ivan Todosijevic for what it says is a verbal offense is confirmed, the KoSsev portal reported. Todosijevic, a former cabinet Minister, was sentenced to two years in jail for “*inciting national, racial, religious hatred, unrest and intolerance.*” His lawyer Nebojsa Vlajic told the portal that his client was sentenced for a statement on the 20th anniversary of the NATO air campaign that “*the cause of aggression was a so-called humanitarian disaster which Albanian terrorists invented.*” Serb List leader Goran Rakic told a news conference that he would call all Kosovo Serbs to quit their posts in the judiciary, Police, prosecution and other institutions. Rakic said that the sentence does away with the Kosovo Serbs’ right to speech,

freedom of thought and right to say the truth. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- December 5th, the US State Department Special Representative for the Western Balkans Matthew Palmer told N1 broadcaster in Sarajevo on Wednesday that Washington wants to see a full normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, including mutual recognition. “*If they recognize each other, they could resolve disputes as neighbors,*” Palmer said on the Pressing talk show. Palmer said that Belgrade and Pristina need to sit down, reach an agreement and draw their route to a European future together adding that they need to see what compromises are needed. They need an agreement which the public on both sides will accept and support as the best way forward. He warned that the agreement has to be implementable, just and long-lasting. Palmer said that the Western Balkans continue to be a priority in American foreign policy, adding that Washington wants the region to view the US and EU as the partners they chose themselves. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- December 8th, leader of the Self-determination (Vetëvendosje) and candidate for Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti, said that if there is no agreement on a coalition with the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) his party would ask for new elections. Kurti told Radio Television Kosovo (RTK) that a new election is not the party’s goal, but that it would suit Vetevendosje because support for it has surged since the early parliamentary elections. “*I am pursuing a common interest, a state interest that requires the Vetevendosje and LDK to form the Government as soon as possible,*” he said. Kurti also said that the presidential candidates were not discussed with

the LDK leader Isa Mustafa, but that he insisted on discussing the strategy for early presidential elections. He added that the most important thing was to agree on Prime Minister and Head of the Parliament, as well as the 12 Ministers, while the post of Kosovo's President can be discussed later. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Consultations between Vetëvendosje and LDK to form the new Government continue without reaching a final agreement so far. Vetëvendosje leader and potential Prime Minister, Albin Kurti sent the message that if an agreement is not reached with LDK he will ask for new elections. However, Kurti keeps sending worried messages for future dialogue with Serbia. He did not hesitate to set as a precondition for dialogue restart the exclusion of Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic, which is a direct intervention in Serbia's internal affairs. Moreover, it seems that Kurti's strategic choice is Kosovo authorities to fully control north. Such opinion is dangerous since the balance of co-existence between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians is very sensitive. Possible deployment of security forces and the newly established Kosovo Army in the north may become a reason for turbulence and an armed conflict. In this context, it is worried that Kosovo justice convicted a prominent member of the Serbian minority and former member of the Government, Ivan Todosijevic for hate speech. Such prosecutions, considered as political ones, are alarming for freedom of speech and ideas. Although international community namely the US and EU push both sides (Kosovo and Serbia) for reaching a mutual accepted agreement, it is assessed that negotiations restart and an

agreement is too far. Increased tension is expected in North Kosovo by Kosovo Serbs if a newly formed Government led by Albin Kurti implements his announcements for Serbian List and its exclusion from Kosovo Government (against Constitution provisions). Only through normalization of relations with Serbia, Kosovo will be able to move forward namely to enter the UN, NATO, EU and to achieve a normal status of a state. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Kosovo unresolved status, political instability, corruption, and organized crime are not encouraging factors for its future within European community. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard.



MOLDOVA: December 5th, the Parliament today ratified a joint declaration on the setting up of the High Level Council of Strategic Cooperation between Moldova and Turkey. Under the document, the Council will be co-chaired by Moldova's Government and the President of Turkey. The Council will establish the strategy of development of the relations in the political, military, security, economic, commercial, energy, transports, agriculture, tourism, health, culture, science and humanitarian sectors. The Council's meetings will be held at least once in two years, alternatively in Moldova and Turkey. Within the Council, a joint group of strategic planning will be created, co-chaired by the Foreign Affairs Ministers from the two countries. (www.moldpres.md)

- December 6th, MPs of ACUM [Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitare și Adevăr - PPDA) and Party of Action

and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS)] Block submitted a simple motion against Justice Minister Fadei Nagacevschi. The motion has been read by speaker Zinaida Grecianii in plenum. The document states that the Head of Justice would have “*overcome his duties*” and “*profaned the idea of judicial reform.*” They called for the dismissal of the new Minister and asked the country's leadership for a reconfirmation of respecting the principle of separation of powers in the state. Nagacevschi was sworn in as Minister of Justice on November 14th, 2019 after the former cabinet of Ministers led by Maia Sandu was dismissed by a censure motion. (www.moldpres.md)

- December 6th, Foreign Minister of the unrecognized Transnistrian Moldovan republic (PMR) Vitaly Ignatiev met with Professors of the Tartu University (Estonia) Eiki Berg and Kristel Vits in Tiraspol. According to regional Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ignatiev stated that over 30 years the PMR has reached true statehood and a de-facto vector of settlement has taken shape already. Talking about perspectives of resolving the Moldovan - Transnistrian conflict, he said that now it is necessary to create conditions for settlement, moving progressively from simple to complex, removing restrictions and blocking elements, resolving problems in people's interests. According to Ignatiev, Moldova has been trying to destroy the Transnistria's economic potential during all the 30 years to force its authorities adopt certain political decisions. He said that a great problem is the establishment of Moldovan - Ukrainian customs and border control at the Transnistrian section of the joint border. “*This creates risks for suspending the imports of a great list of food and non-food products,*

including medicines, to the PMR. For already 2 years we are holding negotiations to prevent this problem. We advocate that in this case we have to deal exercising political pressure by using economic tools,” the diplomat said. He added that Transnistria has special trade regime with the EU since January 1st, 2016. “*Since 2012 we have been holding our own, separate negotiations on optimal regime for exporting our goods to the EU, which concluded in 2015. The Transnistrian side has not taken any political commitments Moldova and Ukraine have taken [in the EU Association Agreement]. Meanwhile, we tried to do our best that the trade mechanism to be mutually profitable,*” Ignatiev said. (www.infotag.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Newly formed Government, fully controlled by the President, Igor Dodon has become functional trying to control state's institutions and powers. On the other hand, opposition ACUM Block has adopted a strategy of submitting simple motions against the Government's Ministers with rather doubtful results. It is considered as a useless spasmodic reaction since the Government is new and definitely needs some time so the Ministers' work to be evaluated. The new Government strengthens relations with Russia changing Sandu's policy, although Dodon and Prime Minister, Ion Chicu claim that Moldova will continue its pro-EU orientation. Russia is closely following political developments in Moldova as it is considered a pivotal country for Russian national security. The “Transnistrian case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: December 3rd, a civil unity Government should be formed 300 days before the elections, with an equal number of Government and opposition Ministers. This is envisaged by the Law on the Government of Montenegro, proposed by Democratic Montenegro (Demokratska Crna Gora - DCG) President Aleksa Becic, Democratic Alliance (Demokratski Savez - DEMOS) leader Miodrag Lekic and independent MP Nedjeljko Rudovic. The law, presented at a press conference, stipulates that a civil unity Government is elected before each subsequent election. *“We propose that the Law on the Government defines that, 300 days before each parliamentary elections, the Government of Civic Unity shall be elected, composed on a parity basis by the Government and the opposition. It means an equal number of Ministers from the Government and the opposition, with the opposition having a deputy where the Government has a Minister and the Government having deputy where the opposition has a Minister, in such a way that the Minister and the Deputy function and decide on the principle of co-signature or veto, and that Government’s decisions are made in such a way that the majority of the Ministers from the Government and the majority of the Ministers from the opposition must vote in favor of them,”* Becic said. They propose that the opposition run the Ministries of the Interior, Finance, Agriculture, Labor and

Social Welfare, Education and Health. For the first parliamentary elections, they propose electing the Government of Civil Unity under the Agreement for the Future immediately after the Law enters into force, and for all subsequent ones according to the model they proposed and which would become part of the legal system. (www.rtcg.me)

- December 6th, Montenegro’s Government pushed ahead on Thursday with a controversial proposed law on religious freedom, despite continuing strong opposition from the country’s main faith body, the Serbian Orthodox Church, which accuses it of planning to confiscate its assets. As in the original draft in May, the new law proposes to register as state property of all religious buildings and sites formerly owned by the independent kingdom of Montenegro before it became part of the Serb-dominated Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later called Yugoslavia, in 1918. The new law states that religious communities can only retain their assets if they can produce clear evidence of the right to ownership, triggering accusations from the Serbian Orthodox Church that the Government plans to dispute its holdings. Justice Minister Zoran Pazin said that while the Government wanted to protect the nation’s cultural property, it had no intention of confiscating churches. *“The Government does not intend to enter churches, nor does it intend to prevent anyone from*

enjoying their religious rights in these buildings,” he said on Thursday. The Minister said he expected the Serbian Church to “participate in a free, legal discussion of these issues, and I am sure that their position will not be absent.” The Government proposed the law after consulting the Venice Commission – the advisory body to the Council of Europe – and, it claimed, some Serbian Church representatives. The Venice Commission welcomed the law in principle but called for more clarity. It was returned for revision in June after Serbian bishops said at an emergency Church council held in the capital, Podgorica, that they would defend their Church’s property with their lives. Although the Church’s leading bishop in Montenegro, Metropolitan Amfilohije, and Prime Minister Dusko Markovic said after a meeting in September that they expected a compromise solution, Markovic later told the public broadcaster in October that the Government was ready to propose the law, whether or not it got Church approval. “Then we will bring to law everyone in Montenegro, including the SPC [Serbian Church],” Markovic said. The Government says that while the new law will establish the state’s property rights over the cultural heritage of Montenegro, any disputes over ownership with religious groups will be resolved by the Courts, just like any other property disputes. The law will now be sent to Parliament where it will be discussed at a special session in late-December. Pro-Serbian

opposition parties warned that the Government risked jeopardizing social peace in Montenegro. The largest opposition bloc, the Democratic Front (Demokratski Front – DF), said mass protests against the law were likely. “The law ... creating a dangerous situation. If the Government remains stubborn, a huge number of citizens think protests should be organized,” DF MP Predrag Bulatovic told Parliament on Thursday. The Serbian Orthodox Church is the largest denomination in multi-ethnic Montenegro, but its relations with the country’s pro-Western Government have always been poor. The Government considers the Church hostile to the country’s independence, and generally too pro-Serbian and pro-Russian. The Church accuses the Government of routinely trying to undermine it and strip the country of its Serbian heritage. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- December 8th, the Ministry of Defense’s decision to swap the Gazelle helicopters with Bell 505 ones is a little bit surprising, as the military’s long-term defense plan foresees the retention of four Gazelles, military analyst, Aleksandar Radic, told Pobjeda daily. Montenegro’s Ministry of Defense, on the other hand, announced they were going to get four Bell 505 Jet Ranger X helicopters next year. They told Pobjeda daily these helicopters will replace the existing four Gazelles. “The decision to replace Gazelle helicopters is somewhat surprising because

last year, the planning documents for the development of the Montenegrin Army defined that by 2028, four Gazelles would be retained along with modernized avionics and completed C2 review. In December last year, a procedure was launched to sell the surplus of 13 Gazelles owned by the Army of Montenegro. The purchase of three Bell 412s solved the problem of a lack of a larger machine that the Army did not have, which could be used for transportation of people and materials, search and rescue, firefighting etc,” Radic said. According to him, it is about the new aircraft which is primarily for civilian use, and might be useful for Police and other security forces. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension and abnormality continues as ruling DPS insists that there is no need for a transitional Government rejecting opposition’s request. Opposition appears divided strengthening ruling DPS’s power. A possible boycott by opposition of the next parliamentary elections will have negative impact in country’s political stability, consolidation of democracy, and economic growth. Opposition DCG and DEMOS presented a controversial draft law for forming a “technical” Government 300 days before every parliamentary election in the country. Such a proposal raises question even for its democratic basis. Montenegro claims readiness to open Chapter 8 of EU accession negotiation process but it is still doubtful if the coveted invitation letter from Brussels will arrive in Podgorica. Although the Government tries to

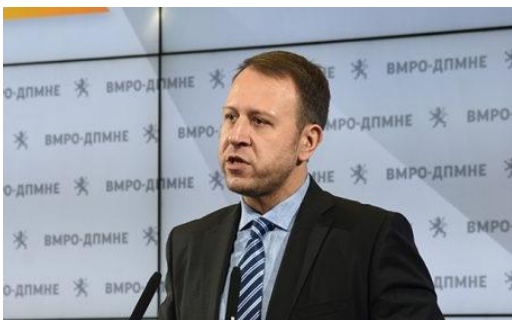
appear calm, the fact is that concerns have been raised in the country for its EU route. The Government promotes state’s political and economic stability which creates an almost ideal investment environment. However, the state needs more concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Russian influence continues to be considered as a “threat” against state’s national security. Moreover, Serbian intervention in Montenegrin internal affairs is considered also as a notable problem which needs to be resolved. Serbia refuses to abandon the view that Montenegro is the “natural extension of the country.” In this context, the Government promotes a controversial law regarding religious freedom which may become a source of turbulence if the law is come in effect. Montenegro Orthodox Church sees the law as a threat against its property and will fight back. It is assessed that Montenegro Government approaches the Church as a “long hand” of Serbia and Russia in the country and so it tries to cut it out. The country focuses on strengthening its Armed Forces by purchasing modern equipment and reducing the average age of its military personnel (currently 37 years old).



NORTH MACEDONIA:

December 6th, asked on Kanal 5 about the name dispute and the country’s new name, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за

македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) Secretary-General Igor Janusev said that no one can forbid him or deny him how he feels about the Prespa Agreement and he said that he would never accept North Macedonia's new name. "No one can forbid me or deny me how I feel about that deal. Where we have not only changed constitutional name, where we have literally violation of our identity and language. I am Igor Janusev, I am Macedonian from the Republic of Macedonia who speaks Macedonian language, can you forbid me to feel negatively and consider this agreement as capitulation? Why, that is my right. I am Igor Janusev, I am Macedonian from the Republic of Macedonia who speaks Macedonian language," Janusev said. Asked if VMRO-DPMNE comes to power whether he will use the new name or the name the Republic of Macedonia, Janusev said he never had nor will ever, never under no circumstances, nor in intimate conversation, add the adjective to the name. (www.republika.mk)



VMRO-DPMNE Secretary-General, Igor Janusev
(Photo source: www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk)

- December 8th, three parties representing ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia, Besa Movement (Lëvizja Besa – BESA), the Alliance of Albanians (Aleanca për Shqiptarët – AA) and Alternative, said that they will not accept the ruling of the Venice Commission which found significant

problems with the law on the use of the Albanian language in North Macedonia. AA official Arben Taravari said that the law should never have been sent to the Commission to get its opinion and insists that Albanians should not be treated as an ethnic minority in the country. BESA leader Bilal Kasami said that the Albanian language needs to be added to the North Macedonia's Constitution as an official language, and that this should become a request of all Albanian parties. Alternative also calls for additional official use of the Albanian language, beyond what was provided in the law. The Commission strongly objected to the way in which the law was adopted, its lack of provisions for other minority groups and the complications it will cause while expanding the official use of the Albanian language in parts of North Macedonia with little to no ethnic Albanians. (www.republika.mk)

- December 8th, President Stevo Pendarovski told the press that he is not certain elections will take place on April 12th, 2020 as the major parties agreed at the crisis meeting organized by Pendarovski after North Macedonia was not given the date to open EU accession talks. A number of top officials from the ruling Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM) party said that the elections may be postponed because of the issue with Spain not being able to ratify North Macedonia's NATO accession protocol in time. "*I am not convinced the elections will take place since it is not up to me. The Parliament is dissolved with 61 votes in favor and it depends on when these votes will be found,*" Pendarovski said. The Parliament is supposed to dissolve on February 11th, 2020 so that elections could be held on April 12th. The opposition Internal

Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) party proposed that North Macedonia pre-ratifies the NATO accession protocol without waiting on Spain, in order to avoid delays on end if the Spanish ratification happens between February 11th and April 12th, when North Macedonia will not have a Parliament. Pendarovski said that he is fine with this option, but the Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev’s Government has not advanced the proposal forward, which allows it to keep the option of postponing the elections on the pretext of NATO ratification. (www.republika.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Early parliamentary elections are scheduled for April 12th, 2020, while an interim Government is expected to be formed on January 3rd, 2020. However, it is not still certain that ruling SDSM and Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev will follow the forementioned timetable, citing the need for a functional Parliament to ratify the NATO accession process. Opposition will not accept a postponement of the interim Government and elections without reactions. VMRO-DPMNE has already submitted a proposal for ratification of NATO process from current Parliament before its dissolution and without Spain’s ratification, which will happen later. It is assessed that Zaev uses the NATO ratification process for his party political calculations. If he realizes that SDSM is behind VMRO-DPMNE with little chances to win elections he will try to gain time by postponing elections. Besides, Zaev he would prefer to go to

the elections with North Macedonia as an official NATO member. On the other hand, VMRO-DPMNE focus on Government’s failure to get a date for opening accession negotiations with the EU, while it raises its nationalistic rhetoric mainly on the name issue and the Prespa Agreement. Undoubtedly, North Macedonia has entered in political uncertainty and instability. It should be noted that the dilemma EU opening accession negotiations or Russian influence is not a realistic one since the country has already entered NATO (the process is ongoing but almost to be concluded since only Spain has remained to ratify the accession) which is a major step towards the full integration of the country into the western security system. The country should focus on reforms regarding justice, rule of law, fight against corruption and money laundering, administration, and respect of human rights in order to accelerate its European integration process. North Macedonia’s politics are still shaken by a series of corruption and extortion scandals undermining not only country’s political stability, but also its European perspective. Fancy names such as “Extortion”, “Empire”, “Racket”, “Titanic”, “Monster” are nothing more than scandals involving politicians, businessmen, criminals, and judicial servants demonstrating that corruption, absence of rule of law and non transparency dominate in state’s function. It should be noted that Justice moves slowly towards full investigation of these scandals.



ROMANIA: December 2nd, President Klaus Iohannis has attended the meeting of the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) leadership at the Parliament Palace on Monday to thank them for the involvement in

the presidential campaign, but also to give them some hints about the next steps of the Government to prepare the local and general elections. Discussions also tackled the intended initiatives in the Parliament, such as the repeal of the compensatory appeal, the amendment of the justice laws or the steps to amend the electoral laws to enable the elections of Mayors in two rounds. The Head of state called on the Liberals to not underestimate the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD). *“PSD took the fall three times this year, but I tell you that PSD has not been totally removed from power. PSD still has a huge number of MPs, a high number of Mayors and therefore, we should enjoy victory, but self-sufficiency would be our greatest mistake,”* Iohannis underlined. He added he expects from the new Government total involvement, in order *“to have a country without PSD by the end of 2020. PSD does not belong at the helm of the state institutions anymore (...) PSD has inhibited Romania’s growth in the past 30 years. Romanians, too, have proved that they want no more PSD at the top of the state. This is a goal to be pursued in the coming period.”* Sources told mass media that the President had also urged Liberals to find solutions to replace the Social Democrats from the leadership of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Iohannis said there is a lot of talk about the compensatory appeal, the elections of Mayors on two rounds and other, but argued the main priority now is the 2020 budget draft. *“All will be solved at the right time; I had the request to solve the most urgent thing now, meaning the 2020 state budget. After that we can think at the other issues,”* he said, asked about plans on the justice laws. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- December 3rd, Romania’s Government will attempt to have several key bills passed quickly by the lawmakers under an accelerated procedure that gives opposition parties the chance to launch a no-confidence motion and overthrow the cabinet, Profit.ro said. The Government will thus *“assume responsibility”* under this procedure for two packages of bills in the areas of justice and economy as soon as this week, Prime Minister Ludovic Orban announced after the leadership of the ruling National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) held a meeting attended by President Klaus Iohannis as well. Specifically, in the area of justice the Government wants to cancel the procedure of *“compensatory appeal,”* a procedure that allows the early release of criminals who served part of their term in improper detention conditions, which has led to the release of dangerous criminals, some of whom have committed new crimes. The Government also wants to defer the early retirement of Magistrates, approved by the previous Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) majority, which could lead to the retirement of many senior Magistrates in Romania and block the local justice system starting January 2020. Other measures are replacing the two-Judge panels with three-Judge panels and increasing the training period for Magistrates. As regards the economic bills envisaged for quick endorsement, Orban announced the Government will seek to reverse the effects of the emergency ordinance (OUG) 114/2018. He specifically mentioned the sector of energy, where the European Commission has urged Romania to take measures and restore the liberalization process of the gas and electricity markets. *“Our goal is to cancel the provisions related to energy, namely the taxation in the energy sector [the 2% turnover tax], and*

we also want to lift regulation of electricity and natural gas prices sold by producers to residential consumers,” said Orban. (www.romania-insider.com)

- December 5th, *“We need to link the approach to 5G technology to the national security and NATO security,”* Romania’s President Klaus Iohannis said after he attended the NATO Summit in London, G4media.ro reported. *“This issue has been addressed by some of the participants in the discussion [...]. It is a process that has not resulted in a decision yet, but the fact that the discussion was reiterated shows that this concern exists and it is a real one,”* Iohannis stated. He also said that once 5G technology is introduced, security will become vital, because 5G is designed to enter into all spheres of daily life, the state institutions, the communication between citizens and state institutions, and between institutions. The issue was introduced on the NATO Summit’s agenda by the US, which is worried about China’s dominance of 5G telecom networks. This year, the US has warned allies against using equipment made by China’s Huawei Technologies, saying that its gear could be used by China for spying. Romania is one of the countries that have complied with the US suggestions in this area. Moreover, Romania and the US signed a memorandum on setting strict rules for 5G technology providers, during Iohannis’ visit to the White House in August this year. NATO leaders met on December 3rd – 4th, 2019 in London to discuss the future of the Alliance, amid growing tensions after French President’s famous statement about NATO being *“brain dead.”* *“NATO is united, we are united, NATO is strong and we move forward together*

without any question mark,” Iohannis said after the summit. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

After his re-election, the President Klaus Iohannis seeks to degrade PSD control in state’s institutions. Not only that, but he asked from the Government to accelerate legislative work in order to pass critical laws. Elections should not be expected before spring 2020, giving the necessary time to PSD to be reorganized and even to take in advantage a possible wear of former ruling party. Iohannis underlined to his colleagues in PNL that they should not underestimate PSD and its political power. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries perceiving it as a threat against its national security. Romania keeps strengthening its Armed Forces seeking to achieve NATO standards.



SERBIA: December 3rd, the EU member states have reached agreement on Serbia opening another chapter in its pre-accession negotiations, the Serbian state TV (RTS) said quoting unnamed sources in Brussels. The sources said that chapter 4 (free movement of capital) will be opened at an inter-governmental conference on December 10th, 2019. The RTS said that the Serbian authorities are ready to open chapter 2 (freedom of movement for workers), chapter 21 (trans-European networks) and chapter 14 (transport policy) but that political agreement had been reached only for chapter 4. Serbia has opened 17 of the total of 35 negotiation chapters

and has temporarily closed two. It has opened only one chapter this year – chapter 9 (financial services). (www.rs.n1info.com)

- December 6th, Oleksandr Aleksandrovych, the Ukraine Ambassador to Serbia said on Friday he hoped no one from the country's authorities would meet the representatives from Crimea, peninsula belonging to Ukraine and annexed by Russia in early 2014, who joined members of Duma in a visit to Belgrade, the Beta news agency reported. He added that Serbia did not recognize Crimea, as Ukraine did not recognise Kosovo. *“Our two countries have a friendly relationship, and I hope that in the future there will not be such provocations against our two countries,”* Aleksandrovych told Radio Free Europe (RFE). The Crimea delegation, a part of Duma team, included a Crimea MP Natalia Poklonskaya and Vice-President of Crimea Ministerial Council and permanent Russian representative to Crimea Grigory Muradov. They visited Serbia's Parliament on Thursday, meeting the opposition nationalist Serbian Movement Dveri (Srpski Pokret Dveri), leader Bosko Obradovic whom they made a photo with in front of the Crimea flag, a present to Obradovic. Aleksandrovych condemned the visit by the two officials from Crimea, mainly because, as he said, their role in the Russian annexation of the peninsula. *“On one hand, I am glad that no one from Serbia's authorities met the representatives of the so-called ‘Republic of Crimea.’ On the other, we do not understand that the visit to Serbia which supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine, was allowed,”* Aleksandrovych told RFE. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- December 7th, *“Serbia never had anything like this,”* President Aleksandar Vucic said during the

presentation of new Army helicopters on Saturday at the Colonel Pilot Milenko Pavlovic airport in Batajnica, near the capital. The new helicopters, the Mi-35M, the Mi-17 V5 and the H-145M, are *“the most modern European and Russian military helicopters which are hardly rivaled by any others in the world,”* he said. The helicopters are meant primarily for transport, such as for taking parachute units to assault missions and combat operations, but can also be used for firefighting, he explained. Vucic also commented on a recent statement by the Kosovo Prime Minister-designate, Albin Kurti, who said he *“did not want to see him at the negotiation table”* in the Belgrade - Pristina talks, arguing that this indicates that Kurti wants to get involved in the Belgrade's internal policy. (www.rs.n1info.com)



Newly arrived attach helicopter Mi 35M

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

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

President Aleksandar Vucic met his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin to Sochi in a rather difficult period in relations of the two countries. The spy case and the “Krusik” affair where Serbian ammunitions were sold to Ukraine have created some shadows in the close relationship between Serbia and Russia. However, it is considered that both countries interests are more important compared with these low scale

incidents. Russia needs its only loyal friend in Southeastern Europe and Serbia needs Russia, a UN Security Council member. Political tension continues in Serbia with opposition persistently refusing dialogue with ruling SNS and hardening its stance against the Government. Potential boycott of the elections by opposition will affect Serbia's political stability, economic growth, and its European process. The EU has raised serious concerns over Serbia's effectiveness on independence and accountability of the judiciary, freedom of expression, prevention of corruption and the fight against organized crime. Regarding Kosovo, Serbia is waiting to see initiatives and actions of the new Government which will be formed (most likely) with Vetevendosje leader, Albin Kurti as the Prime Minister. A possible deployment and permanent presence of Kosovo security forces in Serb majority north Kosovo would bring tension and turbulence. However, the US and EU are increasing pressure on both sides to restart dialogue. According to information the US mainly seek to forward talks between the two parties before the Serbian elections on spring 2020 but it is very unlikely to see this happens. Serbia insists that taxes should be revoked for joining dialogue. One should have in mind that top state officials have said repeatedly in public that Serbia will protect Kosovo Serbs by any mean including security and military force. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state.



SLOVENIA: December 2nd,
Opposition Slovenian Democratic
Party (Slovenska Demokratska Stranka – SDS)

leader Janez Jansa expects “*an early election sooner or later*” because the Government coalition is running out of “*sweets*” to distribute among voters, “*which will cause big trouble.*” If fragmented, minority Governments do not last long, Jansa said as he commenced on political developments on the sidelines of an event marking the 30th anniversary of the DEMOS Government. The current coalition will “*keep the Government alive for a while longer, but all they can do is har,*” said Jansa, whose SDS won the 2018 election but could not form a Government as practically all parties rejected working with it. (www.sta.si)

- December 2nd, Slovenia advocates a comprehensive approach to migrations in the future EU migration and asylum policy. The underlying goal must be to reduce illegal migrations, Interior Minister Bostjan Poklukar told a session of the EU's Justice and Home Affairs Council. It is necessary to relieve the burden on countries in the management of migrations and establish a new European asylum agency. Poklukar also highlighted the costs incurred by local communities along the border, for example damage to infrastructure, and said the EU should make allowance for such damage in its financial plans. (www.sta.si)

- December 4th, migration crisis, security issues, EU enlargement, and nuclear waste management were discussed as President Borut Pahor met the presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina at the outset of an official two-day visit. Pahor said that Slovenia was favorably inclined to Bosnia and respected its results despite the numerous challenges it faced. He also said Slovenia had always supported EU enlargement to the Western Balkans. Presidency chairman Zeljko Komsic was glad his country had

a friend in Slovenia, saying he was happy that Pahor supported the “mini Schengen” initiative as every cooperation was welcome. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Marjan Sarec's minority Government continues to enjoy support in the Parliament. It seems that the Left party's withdrawal did not affect the ruling coalition's sustainability. Although the Prime Minister is reassuring for the Government's stability and sustainability there are questions over its effectiveness. The possibility of snap elections is rather unlikely, however it is not certain what will happen when the Government bases its viability on opposition support. As the Prime Minister said a lot of compromise is needed. Opposition SNS (and NSi) offered their parliamentary support in the Government. Slovenia – Croatia relations may be tested in coming period due to the latter's effort to join the Schengen Zone. Slovenia appears determined to play the “Schengen Zone card” in order to push Croatia to implement the ruling arbitration regarding the Piran Bay dispute, but it is not sure if it will insist until the end of the process. It might Slovenia be isolated by the other member states; it is not an easy way to veto in EU institutions. It should be underlined that relations between Croatia and Slovenia are in low level and an “underworld war” is ongoing (at political, diplomatic and intelligence context) due to the two countries border dispute. The issue of illegal migrants entering Slovenia mainly from Croatia is high in the agenda lately. The Government deployed military force to support Police tasks. Local communities and municipal authorities in the border with Croatia call for more effective measures against illegal migration. The Slovenian

Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. The annual report on the Armed Forces operational readiness released by the Armed Forces Chief of Staff is disappointing since it assessed that the Armed Forces have limited operational capabilities in war time namely they cannot accomplish their mission. The med-term 2018 – 2023 defense program it could improve situation, but under current political situation it is doubtful if it will be implemented to the end. However, the 2020 and 2021 budget foresees increased funding for defense sector.



TURKEY: December 2nd, Turkey's economy shook off recession to grow 0.9% in the three months ending in September from the same period the year before. The data, released on Monday, broke three straight quarters of contraction that followed last year's currency crisis. Turkey has a track record of 5% growth, but a 30% slide in the lira last year pushed up inflation and interest rates, while domestic demand tumbled. The Central Bank has since slashed borrowing costs to revive activity. Monday's data was roughly in line with a Reuters News Agency poll that forecast one percent year-on-year expansion in the third quarter. The poll also predicted that the economy will grow 0.5 percent in 2019 as a whole. The Government has forecast 0.5% growth for this year and 5% growth in 2020. Finance Minister Berat Albayrak wrote on social media that leading indicators for the fourth quarter showed growth momentum continues to increase. But economists say achieving the Government's target could prove difficult. The lira stood at 5.7550 against the dollar after the data's release, weakening from

5.74 beforehand. Compared to the second quarter, Gross Domestic Product expanded by a seasonally and calendar-adjusted 0.4%, its third positive quarter-on-quarter reading in a row, TUIK data showed. As the economy has recovered, inflation tumbled to single digits in October due to base effects, and loan growth picked up thanks to Central Bank rate cuts. In the second quarter, the economy shrank a revised 1.6% from the previous year. In late October, the Central Bank slashed interest rates more than expected to 14%, continuing an aggressive bout of cuts from 24% since July to help revive the recession-hit economy. The Central Bank Governor subsequently said the Bank had used a significant part of its leeway for loosening monetary policy. Last week, he said the Bank will use required reserves to support real-sector access to loans and loan growth. *“The economic confidence index and its components suggest a broad-based recovery in economic activity in Q4,”* the QNB Finansbank note said. (www.aljazeera.com)

- December 6th, Russia and Turkey are working on a contract for the delivery of a new batch of Russian S-400 missile systems, according to a senior official at a Russian military cooperation agency. The latest development, reported by the Interfax news agency on Friday, comes after US President Donald Trump said at a recent NATO meeting in London that Washington was considering sanctions against Ankara over purchasing the system. *“We are looking at it now, and we are talking about it now,”* Trump told reporters. *“As you know Turkey wanted to buy our Patriot system and the [former US President Barack] Obama administration would not let them, and they only let them when they were ready to buy another system,”*

Trump said. Amid already strained bilateral ties, Washington has suspended Ankara from the US F-35 stealth fighter jet program, in which it was a producer and buyer, to penalize it for buying S-400 batteries this year. Moscow hopes to seal a deal to supply Turkey with more S-400 systems in the first half of next year, the Head of Russian state arms exporter Rosoboronexport said last month. Hulusi Akar, Turkey's Defense Minister, has said that the purchase of the system - the first such move between a NATO member and Russia - was *“not a choice but a necessity”* because it was under serious threat. (www.aljazeera.com)

- December 8th, Turkey will exercise its rights under international law and international maritime law until the very end in the Eastern Mediterranean, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday, reiterating the country's determination to protect its sovereign rights. The President's remarks came after some regional states had adverse reactions over a maritime agreement Turkey struck up with Libya, which secures Ankara's rights over a portion of the Eastern Mediterranean. He also confirmed that the deal has already been signed and officially went into effect after it was ratified by Parliament and published in Saturday's Official Gazette. According to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, while a country is able to stretch its territorial waters only 12 nautical miles out to sea, when it comes to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), where it has the rights to fishing, mining and drilling, the area can extend for an additional 200 miles. However, if the maritime distance between the two countries is less than 424 miles, a bilateral deal is needed to determine a mutually agreed-upon dividing line for their respective EEZ. Turkey has the longest shoreline in the

Eastern Mediterranean, making it a natural candidate for seeking reserves in the region in accordance with international law. The presence of the (so-called) “*Turkish Cypriot Government*” in northern Cyprus also strengthens Turkey's hand as the country defends the rights of Turkish Cypriots in the region and insists that their consent is needed for any type of drilling activities. The deal with Libya enables Turkey to secure its rights in the Mediterranean while preventing any “*fait accompli*” maneuvers by other regional states. The memorandum asserts Turkey's rights in the Eastern Mediterranean in the face of unilateral drilling attempts by the Greek Cypriot administration, clarifying that the “*Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)*” also has rights to resources in the area. Fellow regional actor, Greece, did not welcome the deal and even regarded it as a violation of its own rights, despite international law deeming otherwise. Turkey has called on countries in the region to work collectively regarding the distribution of hydrocarbon reserves, which have an estimated value of hundreds of billions of dollars and the potential to boost bilateral ties between neighboring countries. However, Ankara's calls have fallen on deaf ears so far and some countries attempted to isolate Turkey from the energy equation. Turkey continues drilling activities in the Mediterranean region under naval protection. Another statement about the issue came from Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. Turkey does not want to come into conflict with anyone but needs to take necessary precautions to ensure the security of its maritime traffic, Cavusoglu said in reference to the Eastern Mediterranean agreement recently signed with Libya. Visiting Rome on the sidelines of the “*MED 2019: Mediterranean Dialogue*”

conference, the Foreign Minister told Italian journalists that Turkey is the guarantor of the “*TRNC*” and has tried all means to reach a solution with Greece on the Eastern Mediterranean. “*The Greek side does not want a solution,*” Cavusoglu said, adding that Turkey has been suggesting to the Greek Cypriots, Greek authorities, the EU and the UN to avoid unilateral activities regarding gas exploration activities in the region and the distribution of the revenue by the commission. “*We had to send our ships after seeing they did not want to cooperate,*” Cavusoglu said. Turkey, as a guarantor nation for the “*TRNC*”, is currently carrying out hydrocarbon exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean with two drilling vessels, the Fatih and the Yavuz, along with its seismic vessels Oruc Reis and Barbaros Hayrettin Pasa, in the same region. Meanwhile, Libya reiterated its determination for the maritime agreement with Turkey to go into effect. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey – Libya agreement on defense, security and denoting new maritime boundaries has created chained reactions increasing tension in East Mediterranean. Turkey claims that is securing its national rights and interests, while Greece declares that it will not accept any drilling attempt within its territorial waters or its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). “Temperature” is rising dangerously in the region since none could exclude a “hot” incident between Greek and Turkish Navy south and southwest of Crete. Turkish top-officials declare that they are committed to protect the state’s interests in the region by any mean. The same time, Turkish drillships accompanied by navy vessels continue gas exploration and drilling

activities within Cyprus' territorial waters. It is assessed that Turkish aggression is a reaction against the ongoing cooperation between Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt. With zero cost so far Turkey achieved not only to consolidate a situation in which Turkish drillships could enter within Cypriot EEZ whenever they wish accompanied by Turkish navy vessels, but also to put the hydrocarbon issue on the table of negotiations, to force oil and gas companies to reconsider their engagement in a sea which is not stable and secure, and to directly question the Cypriot sovereignty. Turkey and Russia implement the agreement on Syrian "safe zone" ensuring a relative truce in the region. Turkish leadership appears satisfied with the final results of the operation "Peace Spring." Undoubtedly, Turkey was one of the winners in Syrian conflict. It achieved to establish a 32 kilometers "safe zone" and to force Syrian Kurds to withdraw their forces from an area of 120 kilometers in Turkish – Syrian borders. In other words, Syrian Kurds are no longer a threat to Turkish security since they are not able anymore to conduct and support operations within the Turkish soil. Turkey continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. The state demonstrates decisively its leading role in the wider region of the Middle East, Southeast Europe, and East Mediterranean implementing its doctrine for a diligent capability development effort to be able to fight two multi-front, inter-state armed conflicts while being able to simultaneously carry on large-scale

counterterrorism operations at home and beyond borders. Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. Turkey develops an ambitious armament project aiming at becoming self-sufficient in defense sector; if it succeeds it will set the base to become a regional military super power.

www.hermesresearch.eu

email: info@hermesresearch.eu

Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas

NOTE

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