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**Hermes Institute of
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SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE TO THOSE WHO SHAPE THE FUTURE

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

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

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ALBANIA: January 15th, the Minister of Finances Arben Ahmetaj announced through a press release that the economic growth will be consolidated in 2018 at 3.9%. The Minister said that the Energy Sector decreased in 2017 due to the drought. As for the employment, according to the Minister, it has been reduced by 4%, reaching 13.6% from 17.6% that it was in 2013. (www.top-channel.tv)

- January 16th, the “BUTRINTI” ship and the 7th Contingent of the Albanian Maritime Force set off for the NATO operation in the Aegean Sea “SEA GUARDIAN”. “BUTRINTI” replaces in this mission the “ORIKU” ship, which served for about a year in the Aegean Sea, taking part in many rescue operations. The ceremony held on this occasion in the Naval Flotilla of Pashaliman, attended by Defense Minister Olta Xhaka. The Minister praised the work and dedication of Albanian soldiers not only in international missions but also during civil emergencies. Moreover she said this ship is well-equipped with the latest word of defense technology, giving the possibility of increasing the range of operations it can take part. The ship “BUTRINTI” is equipped with the 20M621 cannon, 20mm remote control (NARWHAL), which is manufactured by the French company NEXTER. The process of modernizing the Naval Force will continue with the equipping of three other Albanian naval vessels, “ILIRIA”, “ORIKU” and “LISUS”. The 7th Contingent of the Albanian Maritime Force in the Aegean Sea consists of 21 people and is headed by third-ranking Captain Ermal Hila. (www.mod.gov.al)

- January 19th - 21th, the Greek Foreign Minister, Nikos Kotzias, arrived in Korca where he was

received by his Albanian counterpart, Ditmir Bushati for a three day meeting. Korca was chosen as the place where both delegations will continue discussing bilateral matters, in an effort to advance with the talks held in Crete during November 10th to 12th, 2017. The Ministers discussed issues such as the War Law, the Maritime Border Agreement, and practical matters for the Albanian immigrants in Greece, such as driving licenses and retirement pensions. However the Albanian “TOP CHANNEL” claims that both parties confirmed during the meeting also discussed about the Albanian owners of properties in Greece, who were removed from their lands during the war, and the Cham case; the Albanians that left Greece after WWII. Both parties were reserved about the details, but they have both confirmed the positive spirit. “We had some progress in Korca. There is nothing secret about this. The discussion matters have been made public and we are only discussing details,” Bushati said. According to a joint announcement after the meeting “both teams achieved substantial progress towards reaching sustainable and forward looking solutions to outstanding issues, to the mutual benefit of both countries and their citizens, in accordance to European values and norms.” (www.top-channel.tv)



Meeting of Albanian and Greek Foreign Ministers
in Korca

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

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension may rise due to strong opposition reactions against the Government's decisions and actions. Opposition strengthens its rhetoric against the Government. Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.



BOSNIA &

HERZEGOVINA: January 15th,

Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Crnadak in an interview in the newspaper "Vecernje Novosti" stated that Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) will not recognize Kosovo and this issue will not be considered during the current Presidency's mandate. Apart from that Crnadak highlighted that the biggest problem for B&H and Serbia relations are the Bosniak politicians underlying that they do not wish to accept the fact that it is in favor of the country to establish good relations with Serbia and both countries work together on solving the problems and facilitating B&H's path to the EU. Asked to comment on whether Bakir Izetbegovic's departure from the political scene will improve relations between B&H and Serbia, Crnadak said he does not want to specify the problems of B&H's relations with Serbia to one man, but he hopes that next generations of Bosniak politicians will be more ready to compromise and show tolerance adding "We should turn to the future, not live in the nineties." The Minister claimed that the presence of the Office of High Representative (OHR) in the country is an obstacle for B&H towards the EU and expressed his wish that finally OHR's mandate will reach an end. (www.avaz.ba)

January 15th, the Vice President of the Federation of B&H (FB&H) Melika Mahmutbegovic said

that she will not allow the dissolution of the Parliament due to the fact that the 2018 budget law cannot be adopted. She emphasized that if the FB&H President Marinko Cavar decides to dissolve the FB&H Parliament she will not consent in such a decision. Mahmutbegovic underlined that Cavar will bear all the consequences that may result from such a decision. According to the FB&H Constitution the President of FB&H has the power to dissolve the Parliament (Both House of Representatives and House of People, or only one of them) having the consent of the Vice President if it does not function properly and is not able to pass the necessary laws. The President claimed that "*I believe that the parties of the parliamentary majority can agree [on 2018 budget law], but if it does not come to an agreement, I think it is less harmful to disband both houses of the Parliament of the FB&H.*" Cavar added his decision on whether or not to dissolve Parliament is not bound by deadlines. The President recalled the provision of the FB&H Constitution according to which the FB&H President dissolves both Houses of Parliament if he does not adopt the budget before the beginning of the budget year. Cavar concluded "*I assess the greater damage done or not. I expect that the problem will be solved but if things escalate, it is less harmful to dissolve the Parliament.*" However, it seems that the possible political crisis is going to be avoided since the Members of the Government and both Houses of the Parliament of the FB&H agreed on the continuation of the Parliament's work so that on January 17th, 2018 the House of Representatives will hold a session for the budget 2018 on the agenda and the House of Peoples will sit on January 19th, 2018. Given that an agreement has been reached, the Parliament will not be dissolved for now, as was announced by Cavar. (www.avaz.ba)

- January 18th, Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic paid a visit in B&H expressing as a friend of B&H her wish for the B&H progress towards the EU and NATO membership. During the meeting with the B&H Presidency members in Sarajevo, Grabar-Kitarovic expressed hope that B&H and Croatia will improve their relations, emphasizing the linkage in many spheres of relations between the two neighboring states. "I am glad that we have agreed on intensifying our communication, talking more often and working to resolve the open issues," Grabar-Kitarovic said. For his part, member of B&H Presidency Dragan Covic called on Grabar-Kitarovic to use her country's position in the EU to help B&H to obtain the candidate status in the EU this year. Grabar-Kitarovic underlined the economic relations of B&H and Croatia by saying "Croatia has invested almost one billion Euros in B&H's economy and trade was close to 1.6 billion Euros in 2017 and there are nearly 200 Croatian companies in BiH." (www.sarajevotimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Although agreement reached in the 2018 budget law political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. RS rhetoric for greater autonomy and rumors for paramilitary units may raise tension although there is not tangible evidence. Security situation stable; no major threats.



BULGARIA: January 16th,

Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borissov and the majority in Parliament support the introduction of paid voluntary military service Defense Minister Krassimir Karakachanov said. Karakachanov said

that he had not given up on the idea of legislating the return of conscription. This idea was a key plank in the election platform of the United Patriots (Обединени Патриоти) coalition, the grouping of nationalist and far-right parties of which Karakachanov is a co-leader, ahead of the 2017 early parliamentary elections. He said that the introduction of voluntary service was the first step in this direction. While the United Patriots, minority partners in Bulgaria's coalition Government, continue to speak of re-introducing conscription, the idea has been rejected by the majority partner in Government, Prime Minister Borissov's centre-right Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) party. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- January 17th, the Bulgarian Air Force's fleet of SUKHOI SU-25 twin-engine ground attack aircraft based in Bezmer ceased operations because of a lack of resources to overhaul them. The last SU-25 flight was conducted on December 14th, 2017. During the first half of 2014, six SU-25 jets were extended their flight capability which expired in 2017 and so the Bulgarian Air Force do not currently enjoys service of a specialized type of aircraft. At the same time, the situation with the aviation assets in the Air Force is deteriorating. In near future it is expected to stop flying the transport aircraft fleet of C-27J SPARTAN leaving the country without military aviation. It is also expected that the L-39ZA jets flight capacity to put in question while the difficulties with the operational situation of the MiG-29 fighter jets are well known and it is expected to reach critical milestones in the middle of the current year. In the budget for 2018, no funds have been budgeted for fighter jets maintenance setting in danger the operational

capabilities of the Bulgarian Air Force. (www.aeropress-bg.com, www.janes.com)

- January 20th, German Chancellor Angela Merkel paid a working visit to Sofia at the invitation of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov. “We expect a lot from the Bulgarian Presidency. It is well prepared by the Bulgarian Government. The motto ‘United we stand strong’ is what we all need in the European Union.” Merkel said. Moreover the Chancellor paid attention to Bulgarian initiative for a European Commission – Turkey meeting; “I welcome the initiative of Bulgarian Prime Minister Borisov together with the President of the European Commission to meet with the President of Turkey and to talk openly on all issues,” said Merkel. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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



CROATIA: January 16th, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic met with the Ukrainian Defense Minister Stepan Poltorak for talks on the political and economic relations between the two countries and between the EU and Ukraine. Earlier Poltorak met with his counterpart and Deputy Prime Minister Damir Krsticevic. The Croatian Minister confirmed the uncompromising support of his country in Ukraine’s territorial

integrity. Moreover Poltorak stressed the importance of cooperation with Croatia, as a member state of NATO; “a country which has overcome external aggression and restored its territorial integrity” Poltorak said. (www.total-croatia-news.com, www.interfax.com.ua)



Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic meets
Ukrainian Defense Minister Stepan Poltorak
(Photo source: www.vlada.gov.hr)

January 17th, two weeks since Slovenia begun fully implementing the border arbitration award, presented on June 29th, 2017 by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in Hague, the ongoing tensions and flare-ups with Croatia confirm that the border settlement will take more time. In the past seven months, Slovenian authorities have recorded over 1,400 incidents in sea waters now considered Slovenian due to the arbitration award. However, Croatian fishermen, usually escorted by Croatian Police boats, systematically reinforce what they consider within their border. While Slovenia regards the implementation of the arbitration award an obligation under international law, Croatia continues to reject it. The Government in Zagreb insists on claiming that the arbitration process was compromised and it is not ready to implement the Tribunal’s decision. Even though the two countries maintain a dialogue, meetings between the Prime Ministers of two states, Miro Cerar and Andrej Plenkovic have so

far no positive result. While Croatian Prime Minister admits that 90% of the arbitration award is acceptable to Croatian side, he insists on solving the border dispute through bilateral talks continuing to ignore the arbitration decision. He argues that the ruling is not obligatory for Croatia, which had withdrawn from the arbitration process. Slovenian Foreign Minister Karl Erjavec has warned that Slovenia will block Croatia from entering the Schengen Zone and will not support its application to become member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) until Croatia implements the border arbitration agreement. It is expected that President of the European Commission Jean Claude Juncker will invite the Prime Ministers of the two countries for talks in Brussels, in an effort to resolve the dispute. (www.xinhuanet.com)

- January 20th, Minister of Interior Davor Bozinovic met with the U.S Attorney General Jeff Sessions and the Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Elaine Duke during his visit to Washington. Bozinovic stated *“The Attorney General is in charge of the Police, the F.B.I., and the C.I.A., the agencies the Croatian Ministry of Interior cooperates with. The main conclusion of the meeting is that cooperation should continue and as Mr. Sessions said should be strengthened reaching a higher level.”* Both sides agreed on strengthening cooperation in the rule of law, criminal investigations and prosecutions, and to increase judicial cooperation between the two states. It was also discussed participation of Croatia in the Visa Waiver Program pointing out that the strengthening of cooperation with the F.B.I. and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is an important step towards this goal. The U.S officials underlined the importance of intelligence exchange notably on air passengers.

The Croatian Ministry of Interior and the U.S Department of Homeland Security signed an implementing agreement on enhancing cooperation in preventing and combating serious crime. Finally Bozinovic met with the Acting Administrator of DEA Robert Patterson and they agreed to increase cooperation in combating drug trafficking. According to Antonio Gerovac, Head of the National Police Office for Prevention of Corruption and Organized Crime *“Mr. Patterson offered operational training for Croatian Police officers investigating drug crimes and promised to consider the possibility of approving funds for a program that would be established for Croatia.”* (www.total-croatia-news.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Tension with Slovenia rises and determined messages are sent by both sides. The EU and its member states also express their concern over the dispute. Security risk rises slightly and situation is monitored although tension remains in political level exclusively.



CYPRUS: January 16th, statements from the north that Turkey would shortly be sending its first drilling ship to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea to explore for oil and gas were slammed by Cypriot parties. Spokesperson of Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci, Baris Burcu compounded the issue by claiming this would be the natural outcome of the developments taking place in the region. Burcu released a written statement claiming *“Insistence of President Anastasiades in his wrong behavior which also undermines the Turkish – Greek relations and his latest statement that they will carry out the so called Exclusive Economic Zone*

(EEZ) coordination assessment work with Greece in the marine spaces north of Cyprus will lead the island and the region into new tension. Such irresponsible and unilateral initiatives of the Greek Cypriot administration either because of the elections or for other reasons can cause damages that will be not possible to be reversed.”

Akinci commended that Eastern Mediterranean Sea should be transformed into a region of cooperation rather than an area of tensions. He also referred to the explorations by the Republic calling them unilateral and without the participation of Turkish Cypriots. Opposition progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού – AKEL) said that Cyprus has a sovereign right to search and drill in its EEZ and this right has been recognized by the entire international community. The party described Burcu’s statements as “unfortunate” and said they further exacerbated the already tense atmosphere which was created after talks in Crans – Montana in July 2017. The Cyprus Green Party (Πράσινο Κόμμα Κύπρου) stated that Burcu’s statements show the true intentions of the Turkish Cypriot leadership which is to become a satellite of Turkey. Finally the Citizens Alliance (Συμμαχία Πολιτών) said that Turkey should not be allowed to interfere with the rights of Cyprus to exploit its natural resources. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 16th, following expanded talks between the leaders of Cyprus, Greece and Jordan and their respective delegations, President Nikos Anastasiades, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and King Abdullah II signed a mix of arrangements, undertakings, an agreement and a memorandum of understanding covering their mutual interests. They also issued a joint declaration presenting guiding principles for their partnership.

Anastasiades said that the trilateral summit reconfirmed the relations and bonds of friendship between the three countries and set the basis for strategic and regional partnership for political, economic, and social benefits. *“The declaration reflects the common understanding of the three countries that cooperation can contribute to handling the challenges in the wider region establishing peace, security, and stability as well as prosperity,”* Anastasiades said. King Abdullah II said *“The launch of what we hope will develop into a fruitful trilateral partnership with benefits for our people and our wider region. We in Jordan are committed to cooperate in such vital fields as energy, water, agriculture, tourism and moreover the agreements we are signing today will undoubtedly help us to advance our ties even further.”* King Abdullah II also emphasized in Jordan’s cooperation with Greece and Cyprus to benefit from the EU. Tsipras said that *“an excellent initiative has been launched to handle the challenges but also the opportunities in Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The trilateral partnership should have a strategic prospect and for this, it must be based on strong foundations.”* Greek prime Minister stressed that Jordan hosts 1.5 million refugees and should be assisted by the EU adding that Greece and Cyprus are on the EU’s frontline regarding refugees. (www.cyprus-mail.com, www.cna.org.cy)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus entered in pre-electoral period due to the coming presidential elections scheduled for January 28th, 2018. Security risk rises in the region due to the imminent sea drills for gas and oil research and the Turkish reactions which remains in rhetoric level at the moment.



F.Y.R.O.M: January 17th,

F.Y.R.O.M's President Gjorge Ivanov vetoed a law that has made Albanian the country's second official language. According to Ivanov *"This law introduces an expensive parallelism to all levels of administration and leads to their total blockade and malfunction. It would have endangered Macedonia's unity and sovereignty."* The Government of Prime Minister Zoran Zaev criticized the veto, saying the law was *"in line with the constitution."* F.Y.R.O.M's Parliament passed the bill last week as part of a 2017 coalition agreement between the ruling Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Социјалдемократски сојуз на Македонија – SDSM) and ethnic Albanian parties. The law would allow the country's Albanian minority — around one-quarter of F.Y.R.O.M's 2.1 million inhabitants — to use their language in any state institution in the country. It is already an official language in some municipalities with large ethnic Albanian populations. Despite the veto, lawmakers may bypass the President by passing the bill again once it returns to Parliament in accordance with the Constitution's provisions. (www.dw.com, www.mia.mk)

- January 18th, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg paid an official visit to F.Y.R.O.M where he met with President Gjorge Ivanov, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikola Dimitrov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Radmila Sekerinska, President of the Parliament Talat Xhaferi, and with other high level officials. Stoltenberg commended the efforts being made to find a solution to the name issue. *"Agreement on this issue is crucial for your country to join NATO. The reforms you are working on are also*

important: good governance; strengthening the rule of law; building an open, multi-ethnic society; and good neighborly relationships," he added. The Secretary General stressed that reform is not easy, but it can be done. He urged all parties to work constructively. *"I encourage you to continue on the path of reform. We want you to succeed,"* Stoltenberg said. Addressing the Parliament in Skopje earlier in the day, Stoltenberg said that Allies have been impressed by the country's determination to join the Alliance. The Secretary General highlighted that Allies are bound together not just by common interests but by common values, and countries wishing to join the Alliance must demonstrate that they share those values. In Skopje Stoltenberg also met with the leader of the main opposition Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) Hristijan Mickoski and with the Special Prosecutor Katica Janeva. (www.nato.int)



NATO Secretary General addressing

F.Y.R.O.M's Parliament

(Photo source: www.nato.int)

- January 18th, the country's website www.mkd.mk published the five names it claims United Nations negotiator Matthew Nimetz brought to table in talks the previous day between

representatives from Athens and Skopje. According to the website Nimetz proposed: Republika Nova Makedonija (Republic of New Macedonia); Republika Severna Makedonija (Republic of Northern Macedonia), Republika Gorna Makedonija (Republic of Upper Macedonia); Republika Vardarska Makedonija (Republic of Vardar Macedonia) and Republika Makedonija (Skopje) (Republic of Macedonia [Skopje]). Skopje raised new obstacles to a solution to the name dispute with Athens after its chief negotiator Vasko Naumovski said that the proposal submitted by Nimetz was “*far from dignified*.” Naumovski stated “*we have a name, it is the republic of Macedonia... no one can deny the existence of a ‘Macedonian’ nation and language*.” The unusual reaction by F.Y.R.O.M’s name negotiator has caused confusion, after he made his own personal comment on the package of proposals following the talks. For his part, Nimetz struck a note of optimism, saying that “*the procedure is moving in the right direction*.” F.Y.R.O.M Government’s offered a measured response when first reacting to the negotiations, saying only that it would “*carefully analyze*” Nimetz’s proposals and continue building wide support for the issue at home. Official Skopje also said that the right conditions exist to move forward with process of finding a solution to the name issue. (www.mkd.mk, www.mia.mk, www.balkaninsight.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Newly elected Government works intensively in stabilizing political situation both inside and outside the country. Resolution of the “name” dispute with the neighboring Greece is the most challenging task “opening the gates” for the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country.

President’s Ivanov veto against the “language law” set an obstacle in Government’s efforts to stabilize interethnic relations with F.Y.R.O.M’s Albanians. It is assessed that Ivanov works intensively by setting obstacles to topple Zaev’s Government in favor of opposition VMRO-DPMNE.



GREECE: January 17th, a Turkish patrol boat conducting a dangerous maneuver in the Aegean Sea and violating the Greek territorial waters bumped into the Hellenic Navy gunboat “NIKIFOROS” near the islet of Imia in an incident that is seen as indicative of the rising tension between Greece and Turkey. The “NIKIFOROS” gunboat was on a routine patrol near the islet that brought Greece and Turkey to the brink of war in January 1996, when the Turkish coast guard vessel reportedly bumped into its side. No damage was reported from the contact between the two vessels and the “NIKIFOROS” continued on its way, while the patrol boat returned to Turkish territorial waters. (www.ekathimerini.com)



Hellenic Navy gunboat “NIKIFOROS”
(Photo source: www.hellenicnavy.gr)

- January 17th - 18th, the first meeting between the UN Secretary-General’s personal envoy Matthew Nimetz and the representatives of Greece and the

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (F.Y.R.O.M) Adamantios Vassilakis and Vasko Naumovski respectively was held in New York to discuss the decades-old name dispute. Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not comment Nimetz's proposals which were leaked from the other (F.Y.R.O.M) side. "Republika Nova Makedonija/Republic of New Macedonia," "Republic of North Macedonia," "Republic of Upper Macedonia," "Republic of Macedonia of Vardar," and "Republic of New Macedonia (Skopje)" are Nimetz's proposals including all of them the term "Macedonia". The Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras commended *"We have a window for a solution, to the extent that our neighbors' shift proves to be honest."* Tsipras has to handle his coalition partner and Defense Minister Panos Kammenos who has said he would never agree to the word "Macedonia". Government's Spokesperson Dimitris Tzanakopoulos said the Greek Government is prepared to do what it can to resolve a lingering dispute with neighboring F.Y.R.O.M over the latter's name. The Greek Church intervened, with the Perpetual Holy Synod reiterating that it would *"not back down"* over the use of the word "Macedonia" in the name dispute. (www.ekathimerini.com, www.thenationalherald.com, www.en.protothema.gr)

- January 21st, Migration Minister Yiannis Mouzalas is very worried about the current situation, as the influx of migrants from Turkey has increased since the summer, reaching an average of 100 to 150 a day, a ministry official told Kathimerini newspaper. Amid fresh threats by Turkey to stop enforcing an agreement with the European Union to curb human smuggling over the Aegean, Greek authorities fear a renewed crisis on the islands. *"If the daily influx continues*

at this rate, from March onwards we will have to build a new refugee camp every month to host new arrivals," the official said. Efforts to ease crowding at island camps and improve living conditions are progressing, according to Ministry officials, but more must be done. In recent comments to Skai TV, Mouzalas underlined three key steps: the transfer of migrants from islands to mainland camps, the acceleration of slow-moving asylum process and the launch of migrant returns to Turkey. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political and security stability so far. Diplomatic initiatives for resolving the "name" dispute with F.Y.R.O.M may cause political instability due to the different political stance among the two coalition partners. Coalition partner Panos Kammenos' stance is a key factor for future political upheavals. Parliamentary parties assess political cost of their stance in the issue Turkey keeps on "low level" tension in the Aegean Sea (violation of F.I.R and/or territorial sea by fighter jets and navy or coast guard vessels respectively).



KOSOVO: January 16th, Oliver Ivanovic, a Kosovo Serb politician, leader of the Citizen's Initiative SDP, was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen at the entrance of his party headquarters. The Kosovo Police (KP) in north Mitrovica confirmed to media that the attack happened at around 08:20 and that Ivanovic did not survive the attack. According to the Chief Prosecutor of Mitrovica Shyqeri Syla *"Oliver Ivanovic has been killed by an unidentified gunman. He was shot in drive-by shooting in front of his party's headquarters."* The Head of the Serbian Government's Office for Kosovo and

Metohija Marko Djuric announced that the Belgrade delegation had left technical talks with Pristina in Brussels and was returning to the country due to Ivanovic's assassination. *"This is a criminal and terrorist act that must be and will be punished. This is an attempt to push the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija into chaos, this is an attack on the whole Serbian people to push into the hell of a conflict"* Djuric said. The Kosovo Government has harshly condemned the assassination of Ivanovic; *"Violence is unacceptable no matter where it comes from and who the target is. The Government calls on all citizens to cooperate with law enforcement authorities in solving the case and at the same time from security mechanisms to bring the perpetrators to justice"* the press release issued by the Government said. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said that the murder of Oliver Ivanovic was an attack on all Serbs, and that Serbian authorities will be conducting a parallel investigation into the case. *"This is a terrorist act as far as the state of Serbia is concerned, and our stance toward that act will be in line with that,"* Vucic said after an extraordinary meeting of the Council for National Security, called in response to the murder of Ivanovic. Serbia's First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic said the murder of Ivanovic is a mindless terrorist act that endangers the stability not only of the north of Kosovo, but also the region. In a press statement, the office of EU High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini said that she had spoken to Vucic and Kosovo President Hashim Thaci following the killing; *"EULEX will support the authorities in accordance with its mandate"* Mogherini said. The High Representative/Vice-President also called on all sides to show calm and restraint and allow the rule of law and justice to take its course.

The US Ambassador to Kosovo Greg Delawie issued a statement calling on *"all sides to remain calm."* Serbian President announced a two days visit to Mitrovica on January 20th – 21st, 2018 in order to spend time with Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, and speak with them. (www.gazetaexpress.com, www.b92.net, www.prishtinainsight.com)

- January 21st, a scheduled meeting of the Presidency of the Kosovo Assembly was dismissed last week due to lack of a quorum, postponing a planned discussion on the abrogation of the Law on the Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecution Office once again. The Presidency was supposed to discuss a request made by 43 MPs of ruling parties to hold an extraordinary session and vote on the abrogation of the Special Court. The three Kosovo top leaders, President Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and Speaker of Assembly Kadri Veseli backed the initiative of MPs launched in December 2017. The Speaker Kadri Veseli after end of year holidays published an opinion announcing that this court cannot be stopped. He said MPs who initiated abrogation of the Law have failed. But despite Veseli's stance against the abrogation of the Law, the motion was included in the agenda of the Presidency meeting. But the meeting of the chiefs of caucuses of parties represented at the Assembly failed due to lack of quorum. Opposition parties are against the initiative, with the justification that Kosovo state leaders are backing the move to repeal the law fearing that the Special Court established to try alleged crimes of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), might indict them. Thaci, Haradinaj, and Veseli were all senior commanders of the KLA which fought against Serbian forces during Kosovo war in 1998-99. Ambassadors of the EU

countries and US called on Kosovo leaders not to abrogate the law, warning them on serious consequences if they continue supporting the initiative. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 18th, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released its world annual report 2018 in which sees “slow progress” on human rights in Kosovo. Violence against journalists, treatment of minorities and interethnic tension are issues troubling Kosovo’s human rights record in the past year. “*Threats and attacks against journalists continued in 2017, while investigations and prosecutions were slow,*” the report says. Moreover the Government’s strategy for the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities adopted in 2016 was marred by slow implementation, according to the report. Apart from that the report condemns the Kosovo Police’s methods of registration of inter-ethnic violence cases, predominantly in the north of Kosovo. HRW spokesperson Ben Ward criticized rule of law authorities for not disaggregating their data; “*The failure to disaggregate between different types of incidents and the lack of stats on the number of cases leading to prosecutions and convictions makes it hard to assess the scale of the problem or whether the police are responding adequately,*” Ward said. HRW further reported inadequate police and judicial responses as contributing to the lack of protection for women suffering from domestic violence. Executive Director of HRW, Kenneth Roth, emphasized that the report should “*induce concern rather than surrender.*”

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Assassination of Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic set a major threat for Kosovo stability and

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



MOLDOVA: January 15th, the Operative Group of Russian Troops (OGRT) conducted anti-tank missiles training. Training is part of the training program of the Russian Western Military District. Russia holds in Moldova 402 soldiers as peacekeepers while it has deployed an additional force; the OGRT containing approximately 1200 regular soldiers mainly recruited among locals having Russian passport. (www.moldova.org)

- January 16th, the civic group that started an initiative of organizing a legislative referendum on abolishing the newly introduced “mixed” electoral system of Moldova announced it would restart its efforts. Rejected by the Electoral Commission the representatives of civil society announced they would form again an initiative group to collect some 200 thousand signatures for

a national referendum over the question of abolishing the new electoral system. The Electoral Commission of Moldova repeated its motions for rejecting the proposal “*The Commission rejects the attacks against the electoral authority and any attempt to discredit the institution.*” On November 21st, 2017 representatives of several Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) announced an initiative of collecting signatures for a referendum on abolishing the controversial “mixed” electoral system in Moldova. According to the initiators of the referendum the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM) changed the electoral system because realized it would not enter the next Parliament enjoying an estimated 4% of public support. The Venice Commission strongly advised the Moldovan authorities not to implement the “mixed” electoral system at the current moment. (www.moldova.org)

- January 18th, the Joint Control Commission (JCC) continued talks started on December 21st, 2017 under the chairmanship of the Russian Federation delegation. Besides the presentation of the report regarding the situation in Security Area during the winter holidays, the Commission debated on the issue of the installed checkpoints of Tiraspol’s Armed Forces and the adjacent infrastructure close to the newly opened Gura Bicului – Bicioc bridge. Earlier on December 2017 the OSCE representatives were scheduled to present a report on the activity of the neighboring checkpoints but also the unilateral deployment by Tiraspol of new infrastructure, force structures and the increase of the latter before the entrance of the bridge. According to a press release of the Moldovan delegation to JCC representatives of the separatist administration and the Russian delegation accepted to discuss reports on the

“border checkpoints” installed by the Transnistrians. The Transnistrian delegation reported another point to be included in the talks; a Moldovan terminal near Dorotskaya village. Next meeting of JCC is scheduled for January 25th, 2018. In the opening protocol Chisinau and Tiraspol committed to not use the Gura Bicului – Bicioc bridge for military purposes and offered the JCC the power to open the bridge. However it seems that separatists ignored their commitment and activated a custom control checkpoint in Bicioc which most probably will obstruct free movement of people. It is underlined that the Gura Bicului – Bicioc bridge over Nistru river was blown up by the Transnistrian separatist forces in 1992 and it was rebuilt in 2000 by the European financial support. (www.moldova.org)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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



MONTENEGRO: January

15th, United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the largest foreign investor in Montenegro. In the first 11 months of 2017 the UAE invested 92.8 million Euros, according to data from the Central Bank of Montenegro. This amount is almost 1/6 of the total foreign direct investments which were 538.3 million Euros. UAE invested mostly in companies and banks. One of the biggest investments was the

construction of the Capital Plaza Center in Podgorica in which 140 million Euros invested. Russia ranks second in terms of investment in Montenegro with 54.7 million Euros and Italy is in the third place with 47.5 million Euros. The fourth largest investment country is Azerbaijan which has invested more than 45 million Euros while Germany ranked fifth with 36.3 million Euros. (www.cdm.me)

- January 19th, Parliament Speaker Ivan Brajovic called presidential elections for April 15th, 2018. *"I believe that the elections will be held in a positive and democratic atmosphere and that we will show once again why Montenegro is the leader in the region. I invite all adult citizens to go to the polls and elect the best candidate,"* Brajovic said. The election campaigns start on the day of calling the elections and proposals for presidential candidates can be submitted to the State Election Commission by March 26th, 2018. Potential candidates for the state's presidency have to collect at least 7,932 support signatures. The President of Montenegro is elected for a five year term. As stipulated by the law, two candidates who receive the highest number of votes enter in the second round of voting. The candidate who gets more votes in the second round is elected as the President of the country. (www.cdm.me)

- January 21st, according to an interview in "DAN" newspaper the Program Director of Civic Alliance (Građanska Alijansa – GA) Boris Raonic Montenegrin political scene has been contaminated by radical rhetoric, autocratic parties, lacking of ideology, weakened media, populism, and politicized institutions. "In such an atmosphere one cannot expect a constructive dialogue between political subjects," Raonic said.

Asked whether there were any concrete progress in fighting corruption and organized crime he said that key institutions are dependent on political will of those breaching rules. In his opinion Montenegro is not a poor country and its citizens should be aware of it. As for the upcoming presidential elections he believes the opposition is likely to have several candidates trying to strengthen their parties. (www.cdm.me, www.dan.co.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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



ROMANIA: January 15th, the Prime Minister Mihai Tudose announced he would resign from his duties. Earlier the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat – PSD) Executive Committee has voted to withdraw the political support for the Tudose Government. Tudose stated *"The party has decided we need another Government with a different approach. There is always room for improvement. I did not want to break the party. Perhaps I share my own part of responsibilities. The Executive Committee appointed me and they decided for the change. I blame myself I did not construct more kilometers of roads, I did not build more hospitals but it was not a bad year. I will not secure the interim period. I am going to Victoria Palace to take my things out from there."* PSD Executive Committee will meet again on January 16th, 2018 at 11:00 in order to decide on

the nomination of the new Prime Minister. PSD Galati Chairman Nikolae Marin said that President Klaus Iohannis will have to respect the majority in the Parliament and appoint the new Prime Minister at the proposal of the PSD and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților – ALDE) ruling coalition. Tudose had the office as the Prime Minister only six months and a half while his predecessor Sorin Grindeanu, the first Prime Minister of the coalition PSD – ALDE hold the position for less than six months. According to analysts it is not certain that President Iohannis would appoint a new Premier from the ruling coalition due to the fact that it would be the third Premier from PSD in less than one year and the second failed PSD Government. However leader of PSD Liviu Dragnea said *“We are ready for snap elections at anytime but I do not think President is considering that.”* Overall Tudose resignation was the result of an internal rivalry between the party (PSD) and the Government; *“The general conclusion was that we cannot continue this way having a conflict between the party and the Governemnt, and inside the Government as well.”* Dragnea said. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- January 17th, after consultations held with the parliamentary parties President Klaus Iohannis announced in a press conference that he gives one more chance to the PSD – ALDE ruling coalition and accepts their proposal for the Prime Minister seat, Viorica Dancila. Dancila will be the first woman Premier in Romania’s history. However, the President sent a warning to the ruling coalition *“Now PSD must perform. Romanians have high expectations and I have high expectations. PSD has promised major things during and after the electoral campaign. They promised salaries,*

pensions, schools, schoolbooks, hospitals, and infrastructure but so far little has been done. Now PSD must prove that is doing what it has pledged. We have two PSD failed Cabinets one year after general elections won by PSD. It is possible by February 1st, 2018 the entire process to be concluded and the new Government to start working and solving problems rather than make them more complicated.” (www.romaniajournal.com)



Romanian new Prime Minister Viorica Dancila
(Photo source: www.europarl.europa.eu)

- January 19th, Romania’s Competition Council has announced that it has authorized the formation of a joint venture between the state-owned defense company ROMARM SA and the German armored vehicle specialist RHEINMENTALL LANDSYSTEME GmbH. The two companies will each hold a 50% stake in the new venture ROMANIAN MILITARY VEHICLE SYSTEMS SA (RMVS) which has been established in order to pursue the development and production of AGILIS 8X8 wheeled armored vehicle for the Romanian Army. The vehicle will be constructed at ROMARM’s Moreni factory integrating German technology provided by

RHEINMENTALL. (www.janes.com, www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political stability has been maintained by the appointment of a new Prime Minister. Romania avoided early parliamentary elections and the new Government should proceed with necessary reforms and infrastructure projects. Hungarian actions for territorial and administrative autonomy enjoy the support of Hungary and should be approached by Romanian political institutions carefully. However Romania as member of the EU and NATO enjoys stability.



SERBIA: January 18th, according to the European Commission spokesperson Maja Kocijancic Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and his Kosovo counterpart Hashim Thaci have agreed to continue dialogue on the normalization of relations between two states. Kocijancic stated “Serbian and Kosovo President Aleksandar Vucic and Hashim Thaci spoke on the phone yesterday (Wednesday) evening and agreed to continue with the dialogue under the auspices of the EU.” the EU welcomed the agreement reached by Vucic and Thaci to continue the dialogue. (www.b92.net)

- January 18th, Serbia will begin modernizing its M-84A main battle tank (MBT) and M-80A tracked light armored amphibious Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV), the Chief of the Armed Forces General General Ljubisa Dikovic has revealed. “We will begin the modernization of the M-84 tank and the infantry fighting vehicle, in order to improve their range, protection, and penetration capabilities,” Dikovic said. He also confirmed that rapid response armored and scout

units Army would also receive 30 T-72S MBTs and 30 BRDM-2 armored reconnaissance vehicles as a donation from Russia to Serbia. (www.janes.com)

- January 20th – 21st, President Aleksandar Vucic visited northern Kosovo following Kosovo Serb Oliver Ivanovic assassination. Vucic said that it was “not easy and pleasant” but that he is satisfied with his visit to Kosovo and Metohija because he has done “an extremely important job” on uniting the people in the province. He also stressed that he had invited all his political opponents to Kosovska Mitrovica and talked with them. Summing up his 13-hour conversations with Serbs in Banjska, Kosovska Mitrovica, Gracanica, and Laplje Selo, the President said that he wanted to tell them above all that they should stay on their land. He stressed that in contact with the people of Kosovo, he pointed to three things; “First, that there are people who live richly and receive large salaries from the state of Serbia, while others do not get anything from the state. Secondly, these people have made it clear to me, and I am convinced of it too, that with a little more effort and engagement we can help them and make life easier. Thirdly, it seems to me that I spoke in a rational and realistic way about the situation in Kosovo and Metohija, even if many don't like to hear it,” Vucic said. The President added “I understand Albanians who are very much bothered that it has been heard that little Milan from Suvo Grlo lost his father and that his brother was shot at or that a mother with six children lost her husband and had her son shot at. Because until now the story was that only Serbs are criminals” Vucic claimed. (www.b92.net)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Relative political stability. Security situation is stable although assassination of Kosovo Serb Oliver Ivanovic raised concerns over possible reactions or protests from Belgrade. Nevertheless the Kosovo issue creates a fragile balance on permanent basis.



SLOVENIA: January 16th, First Vice-President of the Commission, Frans Timmermans, reiterated the views of the European Commission on the implementation of the arbitration award on the border between Slovenia and Croatia. *“We want both parties to reach an agreement on how to implement the decision,” he said. “I cannot predict what will happen in the next days and weeks. I know that President Juncker is in contact with both governments,”* said Timmermans. In his view, the resolution of this issue is also important because of the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries. With the accession of countries to the EU, the borders do not any longer exist, he warned. *“If we want to show this to the whole of the Balkans, we have to regulate the border issue on the basis of an arbitration decision,”* concluded Timmermans. Slovenian Prime Minister Miro Cerar commended Timmermans statements claiming *“If we do not respect neither international nor European law, Europe is no longer necessary; then Europe is on the path of a gradual disintegration.”* He also recalled the significance of the arbitration award for the countries of the Western Balkans, which require compliance with legal commitments and European rules. Moreover, as Cerar emphasized, it is not just a border between two Member States, but also for the external Schengen border, where Slovenia must exercise control. (www.sta.si, www.dnevnik.si)

- January 17th, Prime Minister Miro Cerar rejected Croatian newspaper's claims that during his meeting with his Croatian counterpart Andrej Plenkovic in Zagreb last December he had agreed to sign a protocol solving the border dispute but finally he moved back from sign it. *“There was no agreement with Croatia on any level,”* Cerar said. He also stated that the editorial was untrue. *“Slovenia, in a six-month period, agreed to pursue a dialogue with Croatia, to agree on the entry into force of the arbitration decision. Unfortunately, still refuses to enforce it, although this is its international legal obligation”* Cerar wrote on the twitter. Cerar explained that the talks with Croatia were held on two levels: between the Prime Ministers and the experts. *“It was never a matter of agreeing on anything. So there was no agreement on anything.”* The Prime Minister reiterated that Slovenia is in favor of the arbitration decision coming into force and does not intend to depart from this position. (www.dnevnik.si)

- January 21st, opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska demokratska stranka – SDS) presented its program in home affairs under the title *“We will protect Slovenia.”* SDS believes that security situation in Europe has deteriorated dramatically in recent years due to uncontrolled migration, and Slovenia *“cannot close its eyes from the growing danger of terrorist attacks and other violence, which is mainly due to inadequate policy responses to illegal migration.”* SDS plans to strictly implement the Schengen border regime at the southern border of Slovenia and prevent illegal border crossings. Moreover police will be used in cooperation with the Slovenian Armed Forces and, if necessary, with the support of international units acting for such purposes. The legislation will tighten the conditions for

obtaining international protection, asylum, and shorten the decision-making time for entitlement to both. SDS is convinced that a more restrictive approach should be taken in the acceptance of migrants and applicants for international protection following the example of some other countries, such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland. Apart from that asylum will be granted only for a limited period of time and after the expiration of a certain period, the eligibility will be reviewed again. In addition to rights, the act will also impose a contractual obligation on the recipients of asylum, and in the case of a criminal offense, the asylum seeker will be immediately expelled from the country. SDS also announced a ban on wearing burka and nikab. (www.dnevnik.si, sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

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



TURKEY: January 16th, Turkey's largest defense company ASELSAN, has signed a contract with the Turkish Government for the serial production of missile hunters. According to the company the contract with Turkey's defense procurement agency, the Undersecretariat for Defense Industries (SSM), involves the serial production of an air-defense fire-control center, modernized 35mm towed guns, air-defense systems, and 35mm airburst ammunition. The systems produced under this contract will be delivered to the Turkish Army and Air Force. The

towed air-defense gun system is designed to perform low-altitude air-defense missions for military bases and critical assets primarily against air-to-ground missiles, cruise missiles, UAVs, and fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircrafts. Meanwhile,



KORKUT Air Defense System

(Photo source: www.aselsan.com.tr)

ASELSAN announced that the serial production of its KORKUT self-propelled air-defense gun system has been progressing well since 2016. The KORKUT, another indigenous ASELSAN design, was developed to provide effective air defense for mechanized troops and mobile units. The system features firing-on-the-move capability with a stabilized and unmanned gun turret. The KORKUT gun system fires 35mm airburst ammunition in addition to conventional 35mm munitions. The system provides air defense against modern air threats including air-to-ground missiles, cruise missiles and drones. (www.defensenews.com)

- January 18th, the Parliament ratified a Prime Ministry Binali Yıldırım motion, extending the ongoing state of emergency in Turkey for three months. The sixth extension became effective from Friday January 19th, 2018. The ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) and the opposition

Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi - MHP) backed the motion, while the main opposition Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP) and People's Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi - HDP) opposed it. According to the constitution, a state of emergency can be declared for a maximum period of six months. To enact the state of emergency, the Government must foresee serious indications of widespread violence which may interfere with the democratic environment or basic constitutional rights and freedom of its citizens. (www.aa.com.tr)

- January 20th – 21th, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that the Turkish Armed Forces has begun a new air and ground operation to oust Kurdish militants from the northern Syrian enclave of Afrin. Operation “OLIVE BRANCH” started officially at 17:00 having as operational commander the Commander of the Turkish 2nd Army, Lieutenant General Ismail Metin Temel. The Turkish land forces consisted of two Mechanized Infantry Brigades and the 1st Commando Brigade which are supported by unknown number of self-propelled 155 mm howitzers FIRTINA and 72 F-16 fighter jets. Apart from that around 5,000 fighters of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) trained by the Turkish Army join the operation. 8 F-16 fighting aircrafts from the Diyarbakır 8th Main Jet Base bombed the positions of Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) within the scope of the Afrin operation. Some of the troops affiliated to the FSA entered the areas occupied by YPG in Afrin. Turkish Armed Forces backed by armored vehicles, Special Forces and infantry Regiments advanced 5 kilometers inside Afrin as part of the Operation. During the movement, no major clashes took place. According to the Turkish

General Staff warplanes and artillery have hit 153 YPG and ISIS targets in Syria's Afrin, so far. “Operation OLIVE BRANCH continues as planned and the ground offensive has begun” the military said. The YPG said the airstrikes had hit Afrin's civilian neighborhoods and left it with no choice but to fight back. “We will defeat this aggression, like we have defeated other such assaults against our villages and cities,” it is said. The Syrian Government condemned the offensive, calling it an “attack on Syria's sovereignty” and denied claims by the Turkish regime that it was informed of this military operation. Military operation will affect political ties not only with the U.S, but also with Russia, which keeps military observers in Afrin and has lately improved its relations with the YPG. Russia's foreign ministry voiced concern over the operation and called on “the opposing parties to show restraint.” Moscow also said its troops were withdrawing from the area around Afrin “to prevent potential provocation and exclude the threat to the life and well-being of Russian military.” The US, a key ally of the YPG, warned that any Turkish military action against Afrin risks destabilizing the area. Washington sees the YPG as one of the most effective forces fighting against IS fighters in Syria. The Turkish attack comes after an announcement early this week by the Trump administration that it would arm and train a 30,000-man strong Kurdish force to police Syria's borders and make sure ISIS will not reemerge. According to the Turkish Parliament Speaker Ismail Kahraman “Operation OLIVE BRANCH aims at protecting Turkey's border security and preventing the formation of a terrorist corridor on the country's southern borders.” (www.dailysabah.com, www.dw.com, www.hurriyet.com.tr, www.aa.com.tr, www.milliyet.com.tr)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

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

www.hermesresearch.eu

email: info@hermesresearch.eu

Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas

NOTE

-  Stable situation. No security risk
-  Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored
-  Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions
-  Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk
-  Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict