

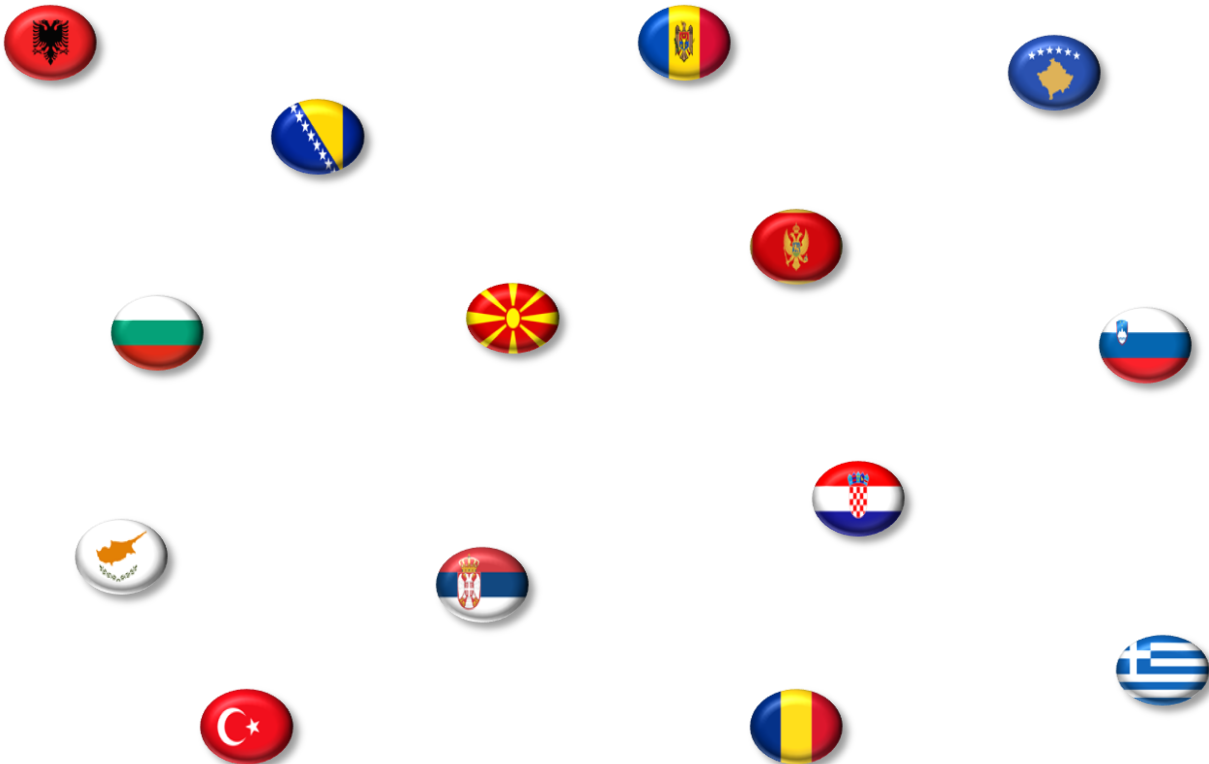
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**Hermes Institute of  
International Affairs,  
Security & Geoeconomy**

## *SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE*

### *AT A GLANCE*



***SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE***

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

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

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

### **“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE**

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**ALBANIA:** February 5<sup>th</sup>, The Albanian Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Ditmir Bushati during in a web-meeting with excellence students claimed that the new agreement with Greece will be better than the one of 2009. In media reports that Albania is giving away 12 maritime miles, or is giving sea territory away Bushati said that these claims are just slanders. *“We have an agreement that was repealed by the Constitutional Court, and this will be the first basis of the next agreement with Greece. The second one will be the international law. Both countries have their own internal legislation and this will be taken into account. Any agreement will be much better than the one made by the Berisha Government in 2009. The Constitutional Court verdict is very clear,”* Bushati said. Regarding the repeal of the “War Law” by Greece Bushati stated that it helps people who had their properties seized by the Greek state. *“For the first time, a Greek Government has officially admitted that this War Law is a relic of the past which should be repealed. The royal decree that established the war law against Albania, seizing many properties of the Albanian state, Albanian citizens or Albanian nationals with Greek citizenship, will be repealed by presidential decree. This wasn’t a bilateral agreement. We will establish a new political situation between Greece and Albania with this process, because many people will have the opportunity to address Greek institutions and demand rights on their properties,”* Bushati added. Regarding the Cham matter, the Foreign Minister said that it is the first time that both states will be exchanging data in case Cham citizens will be refused their passage to Greece. *“The Rama Government is the first one that has officially adopted this matter in the Government*

*program, as part of the diplomatic issues. We have a much more favorable position than a few years ago,”* the Minister stressed. (www.albaniannews.com, www.top-channel.tv)

- February 6<sup>th</sup>, in an exclusive interview with the Greek daily “Ta Nea”, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama declared that Albania has no territorial claims against Greece arising from the Cham issue, but that the families of those who left should be able to claim their property rights in the Greek courts. *“On the Greek side, this issue has sometimes been conceived as indicating a hidden agenda on our part towards a so called ‘Greater Albania.’ Let me be clear, as we have been with our friends in Athens. Such a territorial claim simply does not exist. And yes, I cannot agree with you more than such a territorial issue between Albania and Greece cannot stand. Those who maintain such kind of fantasy, which sometimes finds shelter in the extreme corners of our political scenes, threaten to alter the truth and undermine the future. They must be eliminated with the strength of our common values and the will of building our future together,”* Rama said adding *“The same goes for the absurdity of the War Law between Greece and Albania, which is a living ghost of the past between us and whose legal implications create unbearable impediments for people, such as the ones I mentioned above and many others.”* Regarding a possible agreement in the Exclusive economic Zone (EEZ) among the common borders of Greece – Albania Rama claimed that both countries are very close in an agreement; *“I am very confident that after having agreed to sit together and engage with each other with open hearts and minds, as our people do wherever they live together as neighbors, in Albania or in Greece, we can not only solve every*

*misunderstanding or misconception from the past, but also find the best solutions for our common future. And yes, we are close to finding an agreement on the maritime delimitation as well, which will be fair for both Albania and Greece,”* Rama said. Rama underlined his commitment in building a strategic partnership with Greece “*As Prime Minister I have committed myself since day one to building a strategic partnership between Albania and Greece, based on mutual respect, trust and the will to walk hand in hand towards a better future for our people. It has not been easy, we have had our tensions and frictions, but nevertheless the issues between us have been faced with honesty by both sides.*” ([www.tanea.gr](http://www.tanea.gr), [www.gazeta-shqip.com](http://www.gazeta-shqip.com))

- February 6<sup>th</sup>, following the joint declaration of Federica Mogherini and Johannes Hahn, the EU Ambassador to Tirana, Romana Vlahutin, “*interpreted*” the EU enlargement strategy for Albania under the current political situation. “*We share the same objective namely Albania to become an EU member state. From this point of view, I would say that we need more dedication, and work for that objective that Albanians share. Being united is very important and this should be one thing that nobody should forget,*” said the EU Ambassador. Vlahutin stressed that the message of the EU strategy is a constructive commitment in the democratic process. “*So, my message would be let us go back to work even harder, this is a very important spring for Albania, let us look at the new instruments and opportunities they provide and make best use of it, and finally let's work all together to make the everyday life of every Albanian citizen safer, better and more prosperous. All this is doable; it requires always more commitment, more dedication and allow me to say, even more love.*” Vlahutin declared.

Speaking if Albania will receive a positive recommendation in April 2018 for opening the EU accession negotiations, Vlahutin said “*The Strategy makes clear that Albania has a real and immediate prospect of moving forward to opening accession negotiations, to repeat the words of High Representative. Also, the process does not put any artificial speed limits on countries progress; more reforms you implement, sooner you will reach the goal. In that sense Albania did a very smart thing; it frontloaded major parts of Chapters 23 and 24 through a very comprehensive Justice Reform. It means, in simple words, that Albania has already done a lot of advance work and has gained time for the future, so if it keeps the same focus and speed will be able to quickly catch up the other negotiating countries once the negotiations start.*” According to Vlahutin “*In the same day Vlahutin handed over to President Ilir Meta the new European Commission Strategy “A Credible Prospect of EU Enlargement and Deepening Engagement in the Western Balkans,” as well as the Action Plan to support the Western Balkans transformation. Meta underlined that the new European Commission strategy is a document to be read carefully by Albanian political stakeholders affecting on their efforts and commitments towards the common goal of Albania's which is full integration into the European Union.*” ([www.top-channel.tv](http://www.top-channel.tv), [www.gazeta-shqip.com](http://www.gazeta-shqip.com), [www.eeas.europa.eu](http://www.eeas.europa.eu))

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :**

*Opposition continues its hard rhetoric against the Government but it is estimated that still does not have the necessary political power and capability to accelerate possible political developments namely topple of the Government and early*

*elections. The ongoing normalization of Albanian – Greek relations brings closer Albania towards the beginning of negotiation talks for accession in the EU. However bilateral agreements in sensitive issues and mainly in the Cham issue and maritime borders may cause strong political and social reactions. It seems Albanian Government is determined to compromise with Greece in order to open accession negotiations with the EU. The newly adopted enlargement strategy by the EU has sent rather optimistic messages to Albania underling however that there is a lot of work ahead. Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.*



## **BOSNIA &**

**HERZEGOVINA:** February 5<sup>th</sup>, the Bosniak member of the Bosnian tripartite presidency Bakir Izetbegovic warned that Croats “cannot get a third entity in Bosnia without a war.” Izetbegovic joined a meeting in Brussels together with the other two members of the B&H Presidency about the creation of a Croat entity within Bosnia. “I wasn't expecting anything significant. When the President of the EPP [European People's Party] invites you to come, you go. It was naive to expect that we'd resolve the issue in a single meeting if we weren't able to do so over the past 11 years.” Izetbegovic said. His statements came after a Bosnian Croat declaration which lent support to Croats' campaign to have an entity of their own in B&H, in addition to the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska and the Bosniak-Croat Federation. “This nonsense that serves their own constituency... Do you think that after the concentration camps, someone would allow something like that?” Izetbegovic said referring to prison camps run by Bosnian Croats where Bosniaks were held during

the 1990s war. Izetbegovic added “Without conflict and war, it can't happen. 60% of Croats in B&H live in multi-ethnic communities with Bosniacs. Where would we draw the border of a third entity, a line they couldn't draw in 1993 with the Croatian Defense Council?” adding “Do not cross the red line.” Many officials in Croatia, and many Bosnian Croats, advocate the formation of a so-called “third entity” in B&H, which would be Croat-dominated, as Republika Srpska is led by Serbs. Bosnian Croats also want election legislation amended to ensure that predominantly Bosniak communities elect a Bosniak representative, while Croat ones elect a Croat representative. This would involve dividing the whole of B&H's Federation entity into ethnically-based electoral units. In Izetbegovic view this is also unacceptable. (www.balkaninsigt.com, www.balkaneu.com)

- February 6<sup>th</sup>, The European Commission presented the Strategy for the Western Balkans, which states that with continued efforts and commitment to the European goal, Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) could become a candidate for accession to the EU. “The Commission will begin preparing its assessment on the application for membership of B&H after it receives comprehensive and complete responses to the Questionnaire. With continued efforts and commitment, B&H could become a candidate for accession,” the European Commission said. Sasa Magazinovic member in the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of B&H, who was in Strasbourg in the presentation of the European Commission's Strategy for the Western Balkans claimed “For the first time since the Thessaloniki Summit, our prospects for our EU membership have been clearly highlighted, and representatives of the EU institutions

*emphasized this positive message, meaning in fact the defeat of the proponents of stopping further EU enlargement.*” Regarding B&H Magazinovic said “The candidate status for B&H will obviously not be achieved during the term of this Government, but after the elections and the formation of a new one, which means we have been deceived by those who claimed that B&H will get the candidate status and they were arguing in public for the date it would happen.” Magazinovic concluded “*Since we do not realize the role of crime and especially the interdependence of crime and politics we should not look forward to a rapid progress towards the EU. The EU perceives us as a state captured by crime and corruption asking from us to fight against these two things.*” Representative in the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of B&H Dusanka Majkic assessed in that B&H if it is committed to make progress on its path to the European Union should first solve its internal issues. “*BiH has to solve its internal issues and the key agreements of the three entities. If there are unresolved inter-ethnic issues no progress can be made,*” Majkic said. B&H Presidency Member Bakir Izetbegovic said “*I welcome the adoption of the new European Commission's strategy for the Western Balkans,. The strategy sends a very clear global message that the Western Balkans are a European space, the future of which is in the European Union.*” *The new strategy leaves the possibility that by 2025 we will participate in an open race, to surpass the countries that are currently ahead of us on the road to the EU membership.*” B&H Presidency Chairman Dragan Covic said he was optimistic after the European Commission's Strategy was presented in Strasbourg, but B&H has to accelerate its efforts towards the European project. He added that the speed will depend on

politicians’ commitment within B&H to send strong political messages to the European Union; “*Federica Mogherina and Jean-Claude Juncker made clear to us: Submit the answers to the EC Questionnaire and complete the electoral legislation so that you can proceed peacefully in the electoral process. During that time, we leave enough room for them to present positive reports on B&H, and at the same time we should prepare a new plan of reforms which should be implemented,*” Covic said. (www.klix.ba)

- February 9<sup>th</sup>, The Croatian National Assembly held the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of the Croatian Presidency in Mostar and the Croatian Democratic Union B&H (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine – HDZ) President and B&H Presidency Chairman Dragan Covic said after the session that the outcome of the talks on the Electoral Law of B&H should be known by the end of February 2018 and then Jean-Claude Juncker should also submit replies to the EC Questionnaire. Covic said that the topics of the session were amendments to the Electoral Law and the current political situation in B&H. “*The goal of the Croatian National Assembly is to ensure a legitimate representation of people at all levels of Government, in accordance with the decision of the Constitutional Court of B&H, which means a legitimate choice of members of the B&H Presidency and representatives in the Federal Parliament. When it comes to the current political situation, Croatia's strategic interest is the Euro-Atlantic path of B&H,*” said Covic. According to Covic whether the talks of representatives of political parties were successful or unsuccessful will be known by the end of the month. “*Elections must be announced 150 days earlier, which means it should be the beginning of May, we have three months ahead of us. I will*

*continue to advocate that there is enough time to get in touch. We will see how much we will succeed when it comes to Mostar. Juncker will arrive in B&H on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and then we should give him answers to the Questionnaire. At that time we will know if a possible common position could get parliamentary majority regarding the Electoral Law,” Covic said. (www.klix.ba)*

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** :

*Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. Release of the Western Balkans Strategy by the EU Commission created an atmosphere of pessimism in the country but voices of self-criticism were emerged underling the weaknesses of B&H towards its Euro-atlantic integration. Opening of negotiation talks with the EU should not be expected earlier than 2022. RS rhetoric for greater autonomy remains active. Security situation stable; no major threats.*



**BULGARIA:** February 5<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry of Defense decided to spend 1.3 million Euros to purchase four training aircrafts and a simulator. The Ministry has already announced an international tender in anticipation of bidding. The Ministry of Defense plans to include in the contract a 48-month training program for four instructors and twenty engineers. Air Force is currently on the brink of collapse due to the fact that only a few aircrafts are airworthy. Regarding flight personnel the number of retired pilots has fallen in the last month and the situation appears stable. (www.novinite.com)

- February 6<sup>th</sup>, the Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte during his visit to Sofia expressed support for Bulgaria joining the EU’s Schengen visa zone, but noted that there was still work to be done before it was ready. Rutte was hosted by his Bulgarian counterpart Boiko Borissov, whose country holds the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2018. Bulgaria joined the EU in January 2007 but, like Romania that joined the bloc at the same time, remains outside the Schengen zone. The Netherlands, currently in the stewardship of Rutte’s centre-right coalition Government, has been among the most adamant opponents of Bulgaria joining Schengen, citing inadequate efforts against organized crime and corruption. *“Bulgaria is one of the fastest-growing economies in the EU, and that is something that you are managing to maintain,”* Rutte said adding *“Bulgaria’s role in the future of Europe is extremely important.”* Borissov told reporters at the joint news conference *“I believe that we will persuade the Dutch Parliament to support us about Schengen.”* He claimed that the Netherlands was the number one investor in Bulgaria, and *“that means we have the full confidence of Dutch business.”* (www.sofiaglobe.com)



The Netherlands Prime Minsiter Mark Rutte visit in Bulgaria

(Photo source: www.boykoborissov.bg)



- February 11<sup>th</sup>, Volen Siderov, leader of the parliamentary group of the nationalist United Patriots (Обединени Патриоти) which is a minority partner in the Bulgarian Government stressed that if the Prime Minister Boiko Borissov proceeds to parliamentary ratification of the “Istanbul Convention”, there would be “shocks” in the ruling coalition and early elections could not be ruled out. Siderov asked if elections would be the result of the convention’s adoption said “yes.” In the same time, speaking in an interview with public broadcaster “Bulgarian National Television” (BNT), Siderov said that he was pleased with Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България – GERB) decision to postpone a parliamentary vote on the “Istanbul Convention.” Principally directed against domestic violence, the “Istanbul Convention” has been the subject of a disinformation campaign in Bulgaria, backed by conservative, nationalist and far-right forces, on the basis of it purportedly requiring recognition of a “third gender.” He called on GERB to think very well before deciding to table ratification of the convention in the National Assembly. Siderov said that there was strong pressure for the “Istanbul Convention” to be ratified, adding that GERB had a weakness to succumbing to external pressure, especially when such pressure came from the EU. Siderov rejected reports that there had been a secret meeting between the leader of GERB's parliamentary group, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, and United Patriots co-leader and Deputy Prime Minister Valeri Simeonov, to secure the votes of Simeonov's National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (Национален фронт за спасение на България) to get the convention ratified. Siderov told BNT that if there was such a secret agreement on adoption of the convention between Simeonov's party and GERB, “*first, I could not be*

*the chairman of such a group [the United Patriots] and I would have proposed to expel those who had opposed a group decision to reject the convention.” “We do not need conventions to focus on a certain type of violence. Violence is the same against women, children, men ... it does not matter. Domestic violence is also covered by the Bulgarian Penal Code,” Siderov said. (www.balkaneu.com, www.sofiaglobe.com)*

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT   :

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



**CROATIA:** February 5<sup>th</sup>, Croatia considers returning four defective fighter aircrafts MiG 21 which were bought from the Ukrainian UKRSPECEXPOT state-run arms export company and has asked the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense to replace them with four airworthy aircrafts with the state guarantee of Ukraine. Croatian Air Force bought these aircrafts as part of the overhaul and upgrading of its combat squadron, but three and a half years after the delivery, these fighter jets are grounded due to mechanical problems. Croatia has paid about eight million Euros for buying aircrafts from UKRSPECEXPOT. As a result Croatian Air Force no longer has twelve, but only eight fighter planes, of which most are in a very bad operational condition. In other words the Air

Force has hardly any aircraft to carry out air defense missions under the NATO command. The issue was discussed during the recent visit of the Ukrainian Defense Minister Stepan Poltorak to Zagreb who after talks with Minister Damir Krsticevic and Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said that the 2014 agreement *“is not fully executed on the damage of the Croatian side.”* Poltorak explained that the Ukrainian Defense Ministry has not involved in the overhaul deal and that it was not wise of Croatia to have done business with a company and not with the Ukrainian state. He announced that he would investigate the case, talk with the company’s representatives and inform Croatian authorities at the highest level about the future of the four fighter jets. However the UKROBORONPROM state military industry refuted the information about mechanical failure allegedly found in MiG-21 fighter jets supplied to Croatia by the UKRSPECEXPOT claiming that *“As of today we have not received any official complaint or a statement of reclamation from the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Croatia.”* ([www.total-croatia-news.com](http://www.total-croatia-news.com), [www.jutarnji.hr](http://www.jutarnji.hr), [www.ukranews.com](http://www.ukranews.com))

- February 6<sup>th</sup>, speaking at a news conference after addressing the European Parliament in Strasbourg, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said that, due to differing positions regarding the arbitration agreement on the border between Croatia and Slovenia, Croatia is offering a bilateral agreement in order to reconcile standpoints of the two countries. Plenkovic said that Croatia did not exit the agreement due to some small accidents or idleness. The Prime Minister expressed his regret that Ljubljana has imposed unilateral measures leading to a negative effect on citizens, primarily fishermen. *“Being a serious country, Croatia responded to these*

*measures. However we are not happy with such a scenario that leads to extremely unnecessary tension widening issue’s size beyond the arbitration agreement,”* Andrej Plenkovic said. He stressed that the dispute should *“de-dramatized”* and in this case *“there have been both media and political exaggerations. Neither the future of Slovenia nor Croatia depends on this,”* said the Prime Minister adding that it is important that the problem *“is not transferred”* to people, especially fishermen. The President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker said after Plenkovic’s speech that the border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia is a bilateral and European issue. *“Croatia and Slovenia are responsible for this problem and they must resolve it,”* he emphasized. He added that the Commission offered assistance in resolving the border dispute but the two sides used it only to a small extent. The Commission President then announced that no new country from the Western Balkan region will be allowed to join the EU *“until all of its border problems are resolved.”* ([www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr](http://www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr))

- February 8<sup>th</sup>, opening the cabinet session the Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic addressed the upcoming visit to Zagreb by the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. In his view one of the key items of discussion is that of war reparations. The Prime Minister noted that this was clearly outlined in the normalization agreement drafted by the two countries some 15 years ago. Plenkovic also emphasized that the protection of the rights of national minorities is also an important issue that must be discussed. He said that the Government wants the visit to be as concrete and substantive as possible, which means addressing the issue of the rights of the Croatian minority in Serbia, specifically guaranteeing them

political representation in Serbian political institutions, a right the Serb minority in Croatia enjoys. Both the Plenkovic and President Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic, who initiated the visit by inviting her Serbian counterpart to visit Zagreb, have made it clear that the most pressing issue is that of those still listed as missing from the Serbian aggression of the 1990's. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Tension with Slovenia is maintained and determined messages are sent by both sides. The EU and its member states also express their concern over the dispute. It is estimated that both side will avoid escalation of situation despite that Slovenia has sent the first fines against Croat fishermen. Croatia looks determined to address such challenges by the Slovenian side. Security situation stable but is monitored although tension remains in political level exclusively so far. Dialogue between Croatia and Serbia is a positive step for peace and stability in the region.*



**CYPRUS:** February 5<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup>,

Democratic Party (Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα - DIKO) faces infighting and an internal crisis just after the presidential elections. Party's disciplinary council dismissed 12 party members including former party leader Marios Garoyian and former MP and MEP Antigoni Papadopoulou. The announcement came after the party summoned 22 of its members to a disciplinary hearing for failing to back party leader Nicolas Papadopoulos during the first round of the presidential elections. Papadopoulou said that it was a "parody of a trial" which was both illegal and arbitrary. DIKO spokesman Athos Antoniadis said that the

procedure concerns "those who betrayed DIKO" and that they were summoned to defend themselves. The group of party members is accused of not abiding by their obligations as senior members, for conduct which discredits the moral authority and dignity of the party, and for keeping a stance contrary to the principles, ideology and decisions of the party, all in violation of DIKO's charter. During the election campaign, a number of DIKO members openly held gatherings stating their opposition to Papadopoulos' perceived hard-line positions on the Cyprus issue at which Garoyian was the main speaker. Such gatherings were even held in Limassol and Nicosia on January 24th, 2018 just four days prior to the first round of the election. On February 9th, 2018 DIKO ousted eight more members who supported other candidates in the presidential elections, as an additional eight were referred to the disciplinary board facing expulsion.

- February 9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup>, Turkish vessels are in the area surrounding Cyprus' "block 3" in the island's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). According to Government sources quoted by the state broadcaster CYBC, Turkish vessels were harassing the SAIPEM 12000 drillship shortly before it entered the "Cuttlefish" plot in "block 3." Energy giant ENI gave instructions to its drillship to remain in standstill due to harassment by Turkish warships. Cyprus maintains an open line of communication with Italy and ENI for resolving the problem. Meanwhile the Turkish Cypriot "Foreign Ministry" said it would not accept the extension of ENI's activities into "Block 3", claiming that it belongs to the Turkish Cypriot occupied area accusing the Greek Cypriots of raising tension in the region. The SAIPEM 12000 is still at a complete standstill

while various reports said there was anything from three to six Turkish warships in close proximity to the platform. In the meantime, it is understood that in addition to Nicosia and Rome working to resolve the issue, other diplomatic back channels have been opened with the EU and US. Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides said that the Turkish vessels that had harassed SAIPEM 12000 had forced the captain to manoeuvre out of their way. According to reports the Turkish vessels ordered the drillship to change course. He added that when the harassment began, ENI had told the captain of the SAIPEM 12000 not to turn back and to stay in place to await further instructions as to when they could move towards the drill site. The solution to the issue would come from Rome and the Italian Government, the foreign minister said. Kasoulides stressed that he is certain the Italian Government would protect its interests. On February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018 a spokesman for ENI announced that SAIPEM 12000 will remain in position until the situation created by Turkish military activity in the area of the Eastern Mediterranean is resolved. *“ENI can confirm that on Friday afternoon the SAIPEM 12000 vessel had to stop the transfer journey to a new location as it was stopped by Turkish military ships with the notice not to continue because there would be military activities in the destination area,”* the spokesman said. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- February 9<sup>th</sup>, President Nicos Anastasiades said he will meet next week with the Special Representative of UN Secretary General in Cyprus Elizabeth Spehar to assess the prospects for the resumption of the settlement talks. Anastasiades, who is reportedly to contact Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci next week in a bid to resume stalled reunification talks, said that during his meeting with Spehar, they will

“explore” whether there are prospects that *“could give hope for a dialogue on the correct basis, on what had been agreed.”* His next move on the settlement talks will depend on the basis of public statements and prerequisites set out and on the stances of the Turkish Cypriot side and Turkey. He also urged Turkish Cypriots to realize *“that they also need to recognize the anxiety and expectations and concerns of the victims of the invasion.”* According to daily “Politis”, Anastasiades plans on seeking a meeting with Akinci towards the end of next week. Media reports in the north said Akinci will agree to a meeting with Anastasiades. Turkish Cypriot daily “Detai”, said that despite the hardline rhetoric used by the Turkish side on the Cyprus problem, Akinci will accept an invitation from Anastasiades. The UN is not expected to mediate for a meeting at this stage, as the aim will be to exchange views on how to proceed. Sources cited by “Politis” said it will take time for the two leaders to find common ground due to lack of trust, but also because thorough preparation is necessary before a new conference on Cyprus is convened. Anastasiades stated on several occasions that the problem lies in the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot negotiating side’s refusal to compromise on the issue of Turkey’s right to intervene, and on the presence of Turkish troops on the island. Akinci has said that he is not thinking of appointing a new negotiator at the moment, as he does not want for negotiations to drag on in the same way for another 50 years. He called for a results-oriented procedure and not an open-ended one. Deputy Spokesman for the UN Secretary General Farhan Haq, said on Friday that UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres continues to see what influence the UN can have to bring the Cyprus talks forward. (www.cyprus-mail.com, www.politis.com.cy)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Tension rises significantly in southeast of Cyprus due to the fact that Turkey has sent six vessels to block Italian ENI's drillship SAIPEM 12000. It is a Turkish move showing determination to impose its will in the region and to make clear that "it is part of the game" in Cyprus seabed. Cyprus follows the diplomatic path to deal with the situation since it does not have the military capacity to address the direct violation of its sovereign rights. Cypriot Government tries to engage Italy, the EU and the U.S in the situation but all these stakeholders look reluctant for closer engagement in the region. It is a big question if Greece will decide to send naval and/or air forces in Cyprus to address the Turkish provocation but such an action would escalate situation. Italy (in cooperation with Cyprus and Turkey) assess the situation in order to decide what SAIPEM 12000 next movement will be.*



**F.Y.R.O.M:** February 6<sup>th</sup>, Minister of Defense, Radmila Shekerinska met with the Commander of the U.S Special Operations Command Europe Major General Mark Schwartz. Shekerinska pointed out that after the improvement of the political situation in F.Y.R.O.M the focus has been put on the strategic goals: NATO and EU membership. Defense Minister added that F.Y.R.O.M remains committed to participating in international peacekeeping missions and joint exercise activities with NATO partners, which increases the capabilities and capacities of the Army of F.Y.R.O.M. General Schwartz stressed the excellent cooperation with the F.Y.R.O.M's Armed Forces in the field of special forces and pointed out that the United States will continue in

the future to support the Armed Forces of F.Y.R.O.M in the development of its capacities through various and relevant trainings. The General added that the United States highly values the participation of F.Y.R.O.M Armed Forces' members in the "Resolute Support" mission in Afghanistan and welcomed the decision to increase the number of Armed Forces' members in this mission in 2018. In the context of future joint trainings and exercises, Minister Shekerinska expressed readiness for Military Range Krivolak to be used for joint exercises in the future as well. During the visit, General Schwartz also met with the Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of F.Y.R.O.M, Lieutenant General Metodija Velichkovski, where they discussed the long-standing cooperation in the training, the joint participation in international



Minister of Defense, Radmila Shekerinska  
meeting with the Commander of the U.S Special  
Operations Command Europe Major General  
Mark Schwartz

(Photo source: [www.morm.gov.mk](http://www.morm.gov.mk))

exercises and the possibility of using the capacities of Military Range Krivolak for joint activities. In the framework of the visit General Schwartz also visited the Special Operations Regiment Command of the Armed Forces of F.Y.R.O.M. The Special Operations Regiment of the Armed Forces of F.Y.R.O.M and the US Special Operations Command Europe have

cooperated since 1996 when the first joint training programs were implemented. In 2016 and 2017 the Regiment members took part in a number of exercises organized under the auspices of the United States, including “Sabre Junction 16”, “Anaconda 16”, “Combined Resolve 7”, “Combined Resolve 8”, “Allied Spirit 6”, and “Saber Guardian 17”. (www.morm.gov.mk)

- February 7<sup>th</sup>, The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) is not willing to withdraw its 35,569 amendments against the bill on languages, which advances the official use of the Albanian language in F.Y.R.O.M. “*More than five months of debates will be needed on this bill. We will not withdraw our amendments,*” announced the largest opposition party. According to VMRO-DPMNE, if Parliament avoids these amendments, then they will address to the Constitutional Court, as according to this party, the bill only favors the Albanian community and discriminates other communities. Apart from that, VMRO-DPMNE claims the bill also endangers the use of the so-called “Macedonian” language. On the other hand the Vice Chairman of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Социјалдемократски сојуз на Македонија – SDSM), Petre Silegov said that this bill is in accordance to the Constitution. Parliament Speaker Talat Xhaferi said that amendments had been translated and that they were presently being processed and categorized, but the date for the debate was yet to be decided. (www.balkaneu.com, www.mia.mk)

- February 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev announced that the country’s main highway which runs from Serbia to the north to the Greek borders to the south will be renamed from “Alexander the Makedon” into “Friendship Highway”. At the same time Skopje international airport “Alexander the Great” will be renamed in “Skopje International Airport.” Decision passed by the Government affirming the steps aim at building confidence with Greece. In the meanwhile the Prime Minister stated that “*In the name talks the demand to change the Constitution is a Greek position, but we have our own. Macedonia has changed its Constitution in 1993 by incorporating amendment 2 of the article 49. We have made a major step to remove irredentism. Everything we do now is to prove that Macedonia has no territorial or any other ambitions, Macedonia has no irredentic claims, Macedonia wants to build friendship.*” Zaev claimed that his Government would accept only a geographical qualifier for the country’s name. At the same time the leader of Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE), Hristijan Mickoski said this party does not approve of the constitutional amendments needed to change the country’s name. “*As far as the amendment of the Constitution is concerned, our position has not changed. We will not accept them,*” Mickovski said. On February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018 the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs Bujar Osmani stated “*I think the issue is far too complex to be settled all at once. Now we are mulling a mutually accepted solution. The name issue cannot have a partial solution. It has to be a unique and single solution that is acceptable for*

*both countries, eliminating any possibility to be blocked by Greece.”* Osmani’s statements came just after Ali Ahmeti leader of the Democratic Union for Integration (Демократска унија за интеграција, ДУИ - DUI), partner of the ruling coalition had stated that F.Y.R.O.M is a nameless country emphasizing that his party is not opposing in constitutional changes in order a solution to be reached. (www.mia.mk, www.balkan.eu.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. Prime Minister Zaev works on achieving internal political cohesion towards an accepted name solution. However it is estimated that it is difficult for F.Y.R.O.M’s Parliament to achieve the required majority to modify its Constitution or to approve a mutual accepted name for the country. F.Y.R.O.M’s Albanians push for a solution with the name issue aim at accelerating the NATO – EU integration. Cooperation of President Ivanov and the main opposition party VMRO-DPMNE which is opposed at every action of the ruling coalition puts in danger not only internal stability and interethnic harmony of the country but also its Euro-Atlantic process.*



**GREECE:** February 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>, the Greek Foreign Ministry welcomed F.Y.R.O.M’s move to rename the airport and highway, referring to a “positive step toward reversing what has happened in the past decade and created tension in the relations between the two

countries.” It also referred to an “important development in the direction of dealing with irredentism.” However on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018 the Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos said that F.Y.R.O.M must change its Constitution if it wants a settlement on the name dispute with Greece. Pavlopoulos underlined that Athens will support F.Y.R.O.M’s ambitions to join the EU and NATO, provided that the Balkan state gives up any irredentist claims included in its Constitution. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- February 8<sup>th</sup>, the European Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs Pierre Moscovici paid a visit in Greece where he met with the President Prokopis Pavlopoulos, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, and Finance Minister Euclides Tsakalotos. Moscovici came in Athens for talks on the next steps after the end of Greece’s third bailout on August 2018. *“On the issue of debt relief I am especially optimistic and I believe that our efforts will be implemented and they will be successful,”* Moscovici said. However the EU official underlined that the IMF should join efforts until the end of the third bailout; *“We need it,”* emphasized Moscovici. Regarding Greece’s future after the end of the bailout Moscovici said that there will be surveillance as it is in the case of Portugal and Cyprus stressing that growth began very slowly in 2016, and will continue to rise in 2017 and 2018. Athens and its Eurozone lenders are expected to flesh out a French-proposed mechanism that was presented in June and which will link debt relief to Greek growth rates. The economy is forecast to grow by up to 2.5% this year and in 2019. (www.ekathimerini.com, www.capital.gr)

- February 10<sup>th</sup>, the Government has decided to opt for the formation of a parliamentary

committee to probe claims by prosecutors that Greek politicians took bribes from the Swiss drugs manufacturer NOVARTIS even amid protests by some over the reliability of the testimonies on which the case has been built. The conservative New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία –ND) party indicated that it would support a parliamentary probe but “*without witnesses in masks*,” referring to the protected witnesses on which prosecutors have based their claims against ten Greek politicians. Addressing a press conference in Athens European Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos spoke of “*conspiracy*” and “*slander*” and said he would ask the Supreme Court to lift the protective status of witnesses and reveal their identity. He contested the legality of the witnesses’ statements. The chief corruption Prosecutor Eleni Touloupaki, as well as Prosecutors Christos Dzouras and Stelios Manolis, said in a joint statement that the witnesses were placed under protected status in strict accordance with the law. They also denied reports that they took part in a meeting with Government officials about the NOVARTIS case. ([www.ekathimerini.com](http://www.ekathimerini.com))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*The Greek Government promotes initiatives to resolve long-term problems with neighboring countries namely F.Y.R.O.M and Albania. However such initiatives may cause political tension or instability. The Government is accused of “secret diplomacy and negotiations” and consensus is difficult to be reached. The NOVARTIS scandal strengthens political tension in a period national consensus is needed. Turkey keeps on “low level” tension in the Aegean Sea (violation of F.I.R and/or territorial sea by fighter jets and navy or coast guard vessels respectively).*

*However it strengthens its rhetoric over sovereignty of several Greek islands and islets in the Aegean Sea emphasizing its military capabilities in the Aegean Sea. Tension between Turkey and Cyprus over the oil and gas drills in EEZ of the latter may affect Greek – Turkish relations in the near future.*



**KOSOVO:** February 5<sup>th</sup>, the Parliament of Kosovo has postponed the deliberation of the voting of the border deal with Montenegro due to the lack of political consensus. The so-called demarcation agreement is an international agreement which requires the voting of 80 MPs or two thirds of them. “*There’s a need for a wide national consensus. It’s not only the issue of the liberalization of visas at stake here, but also our partnership with NATO member countries*,” the Parliament Speaker Kadri Veseli said. The ratification of the border deal is now blocked by the Parliament of Kosovo due to the disagreement not only within the ruling coalition, but in opposition parties as well. Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo, Fatmir Limaj said that there is an option of reaching a solution in the political stalemate regarding the border deal with Montenegro. According to Limaj the Government considers some amendments in the initial agreement, which has been ratified by Montenegro, but not by Kosovo. ([www.balkan.eu.com](http://www.balkan.eu.com))

- February 7<sup>th</sup>, the President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci expressed his disappointment over the new European Commission Strategy on Western Balkans claiming that it failed to offer clarity on Kosovo’s membership into the EU, and Kosovo faced injustice. However he said that the country will work to fulfill the EU criteria, by advancing its position. “*This strategy is a determination of*



*the EU to increase its commitment and stimulate reforms of the countries of the region in their path towards the EU. Therefore I welcome publication of this strategic document, which treats Kosovo as integral part of the EU enlargement plans,”* Thaci wrote. According to Thaci because of political reasons, not all countries were treated equally in the new strategy. *“In particular, this strategy has failed to offer clarity on Kosovo’s EU membership,”* he wrote. According to Thaci the EU approach towards Kosovo is influenced by the EU member states which have not recognize country’s independence yet and undermine a coherent stance of the EU on Kosovo. He said that Kosovo will continue working on advancing its position when it comes to the EU integration process by implementing reforms and concluding the EU-brokered dialogue with Serbia. *“Kosovo needs to urgently overcome current isolation, by ratifying the Agreement on border delineation with Montenegro, which will bring visa liberalization for our citizens,”* Thaci wrote. He said that Kosovo should work hard and be committed in order to avoid political barriers, in order to achieve its Euro-Atlantic integration. (www.gazetaexpress.com)



Kosovo President Hashim Thaci

(Photo source: www.president-ksgov.net)

- February 8<sup>th</sup>, Embassies of the U.S, Germany, France, Great Britain, and Italy in Kosovo, released a joint press release welcoming recent statements by Kosovo’s political leaders committing to abandon efforts to abrogate the Specialist Chambers. *“We expect Kosovo’s leaders to keep their word and all Kosovo institutions to honor this commitment,”* it is stated in the press release. *“Only by upholding the rule of law and ensuring justice for all victims could Kosovo affirm its maturity as a state and its readiness to fully integrate into Europe and the international community,”* it is stated in the press release. Embassies announced implementation of the Specialist Chambers will enable continued support from Kosovo’s closest friends and allies. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration moving in the opposite direction towards the EU and NATO integration. The newly adopted Strategy on Western Balkans by the EU sends an alarming message to Kosovo. Although Kosovo political leaders express (under strong international pressure) willingness to proceed with critical reforms it is estimated that political stalemate will remain. Kosovo political elite set obstacles in significant issues provoking reactions from international community such as non ratification of the Kosovo – Montenegro demarcation*

*agreement, adoption of the law on Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecution Office, etc. 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:** February 8<sup>th</sup>, the Parliament of Moldova adopted a declaration condemning the attacks coming from the Russian Federation upon the national informational security and the abusive meddling in political activity in the Republic. The Socialist and Communist MPs left the plenary before the voting procedure, condemning the declaration and claiming that Moldova is itself guilty of “*banning Russian media.*” Proposed by deputies of the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova, - PDM), European People’s Party of Moldova Partidul Popular European din Moldova – PPEM) and by some unaffiliated MPs, the declaration was also supported by the Liberals and Liberal-Democrats. The statement acknowledges the intensification of denigration attacks of Russia against Moldova, some Moldovan institutions, and officials through Russian propaganda but also some media institutions from Moldova. The signatories are worried about the “*institutional abuses*” by the Russian secret services, who also promote the “*satellite parties*” that these institutions “*possess and manage.*” The Moldovan Deputies call on the Russian “*political decision-makers*” to work on blocking the abuses and the denigration campaigns against the Republic of Moldova. They also ask to stop any form of support for political parties in Moldova. In reaction, the President Igor Dodon called the declaration “*the most impulsive*

*anti-Russian message*” in the last 25 years. (www.moldova.org)

- February 8<sup>th</sup>, a meeting of the Joint Control Commission (JCC) did not achieve to reach an agreement on the topic of Gura Bicului-Bicioac Bridge. A press release of the Moldovan delegation claims that the Transnistrian delegation led by Oleg Belyakov refused to discuss the monitoring of the bridge and the Transnistrian “border police” checkpoints nearby by the neutral parties in the peacekeeping mission; the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and the OSCE. Previously, the Moldovan delegation tried to get support for the removal of the Transnistrian checkpoints in favor of the “free movement” principle. Despite unanimous support formulated by representatives of Russia, Ukraine, OSCE, and Moldova, the proposal was rejected by the delegation from Tiraspol. The Transnistrian media quotes Belyakov, who said that “*the Moldovan party is not ready for resolving practical issues*” linked to the infrastructure adjacent to the Gura Bicului-Bicioac bridge. According to Belyakov, changes in the peacekeeping mission, such as the replacement of military forces by neutral observers, are inadmissible today by Transnistria. Reopened only in November 2017, Gura Bicului-Bicioac bridge over Nistru river was blown up by the Transnistrian separatist forces in 1992, then reconstructed in 2000 with the European financial support (but could not be inaugurated due to political misunderstandings between Chişinău and Tiraspol. (www.moldova.org)

- February 11<sup>th</sup>, a contingent of Moldovan National Army service members will participate in the multinational exercise “PLATINUM EAGLE” at Babadag Training Area, Romania, within February 11<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The contingent

consists of 60 officers, NCOs, sergeants, and privates from “DACIA” Brigade from Cahul and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Peacekeeping Battalion from Chisinau and will train together with service members from Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Ukraine, and the USA. The exercise’s goal is to increase interoperability among participant forces, to maintain the capability of joint training, as well as to develop a regional environment that favors multinational military cooperation. According to the scenario, the Moldovan service members will be part of an international company led by the U.S and will have to conduct shooting drills using their weapons and carry out command and control procedures at subunit level. At “PLATINUM EAGLE” exercise, the National Army service members will participate with 12 HMMWVs and military equipment. (www.army.md)



The Moldovan contingent which participates in the multinational exercise “PLATINUM EAGLE”

(Photo source: www.army.md)

## 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:** February 9<sup>th</sup>, the European Commissioner Johannes Hahn said that Montenegro had made the greatest progress in the EU integration, and that it was up to it to maintain that status. At a joint press conference with the Prime Minister Dusko Markovic, Hahn said “*there are no additional conditions for Montenegro’s membership in the EU. There is work that still needs to be done. We clearly said what we expect from Montenegro to implement the reforms and keep the leading position on the EU path. Democracy and the rule of law are key values. The boycott of Parliament is not a way of resolving disputes. I expect dedication to the rule of law and media freedom. Special Prosecutor’s Office (SDT) and the Anti-Corruption Agency (ASK) should be independent. We will not add further conditions for membership, nor eliminate the existing ones.*” Asked how far Brussels was ready to go in defending the public broadcaster from political influence, the commissioner said that the freedom of expression and freedom of the media were some of the key values of the EU and that this was something the EU always dealt with and was committed to. Markovic said that Montenegro already acted as an EU member in many aspects. (www.cdm.me)

- February 10<sup>th</sup>, The Democratic Montenegro (Demokratska Crna Gora – DCG) has reiterated that it intends to provide full support to the opposition’s presidential candidate whomever it nominates. “*Bearing in mind that there have been*

*more and more speculations about the candidacies for the President of Montenegro, we use this opportunity to repeat our clear position: whoever elected to be the opposition's representative in the forthcoming presidential elections, we will provide our full support,"* the party has stated. They also reiterated that the Democrats have not participated in the procedure of the selection of the opposition's candidate and that they do not intend to interfere at all. *"The leader of the Democrats has given up his candidacy and therefore put an end to his potential candidacy for the President of Montenegro. We look forward to having a candidate representing the opposition, whoever it nominates,"* the Democrats explained. (www.cdm.me)

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** :

*Presidential elections have been called for April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018. One could not exclude tension during pre-electoral campaign of the potential candidates. Major reforms should be implemented in order country to come closer to the EU. However the EU expressed its satisfaction with Montenegro's efforts to join the Union. Montenegro intensifies its presence in NATO by strengthening its participation in military exercises and peacekeeping missions. However decision of joining KFOR may cause tension with neighboring Serbia.*



### **ROMANIA:** February 5<sup>th</sup>,

Romania's Defense Minister Mihai Fifor said the state would get involved in expanding the "Mihail Kogalniceanu" military base in Eastern Romania, and has been talking about this with the American partners. He would like the U.S to have a

permanent military presence at this base, like they have in Poland. *"We have asked for a permanent presence of the American soldiers at the 'Mihail Kogalniceanu' base, following the Polish model,"* Fifor said. The US has been using this military base in Romania for the last 25 years and has also invested in modernizing and expanding it. The American military presence at this base increased in recent years as the tension between NATO and Russia increased. The U.S and Romanian troops have carried out several joint military exercises at the "Mihail Kogalniceanu" base in recent years. Romania also uses the base for air police missions together with NATO partners. Last year, British and Canadian fighter jets took part in these military police missions. (www.romania-insider.com, www.news.ro)

- February 6<sup>th</sup>, Moldova and Romania's Defense Ministers said that the two countries will form a joint military battalion for emergency situations; a move likely to anger Russia, which has troops stationed in Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria. *"We have agreed today to go to the expert level and identify the area where this mixed battalion can be placed,"* said Romanian Defense Minister Mihai Fifor at a joint press conference in Chisinau. His Moldovan counterpart Eugen Sturza also announced that Moldova's soldiers will resume military training with Romanian soldiers in order to increase the interoperability between the two armies. In 2017, the participation of Moldovan soldiers in external military exercises was forbidden by pro-Russian President Igor Dodon. The Defense Ministers' talks in Chisinau also covered joint training for both countries' armed forces and the provision of assistance for the ongoing process of reform and modernization of the Moldovan army. (www.balkaninsight.com)

- February 9<sup>th</sup>, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban announced in a press conference that his country will soon sign a 15 year agreement to import almost half the natural gas it needs each year from Romania, which will thus considerably cut its dependence on Russia. Orban stated that three Hungarian companies had won a tender in Romania for the gas, without naming those companies. *“Within moments we will sign an agreement, which will allow for the next 15 years the imports of over 4 billion cubic meters of gas from Romania. The era of Russian gas monopoly will come to an end in Hungary ... as we will be able to cover more than half of our imports from other, in this case Romanian, sources,”* Orban said. Later on in the day Orban reiterated that the Romanian gas imports could start after 2022. Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto after a meeting with his Romanian counterpart Teodor Melescanu in Bucharest last week said that as of 2022 huge volumes of gas from the Black Sea will be supplied to Hungary. Szijjarto said the Hungarian companies have reserved the entire capacity of 4.4 billion cubic meters per year of the pipeline which will connect Romania to Hungary, an opportunity to buy gas elsewhere from Russia. The Hungarian official added that it has been agreed to build units to allow the supply of 1.75 billion cubic meters of gas per year, as of 2020 and the capacity will be increased to 4.4 billion cubic meters in 2022. However, Romanian Foreign Minister Teodor Melescanu contradicted his Hungarian counterpart on the gas exports a day later, saying no agreement has been signed. *“According to the European regulations one cannot talk about exclusive gas resources and infrastructures to a certain destination or a certain country,”* the Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry informed in a press release. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*It seems that the EU put more pressure towards Romania regarding the Justice Laws adopted last year by the Parliament. Not only the EU but also opposition and civic society of Romania raise questions over justice independence. The EU officials keep sending determined messages to Romanian ruling politicians threatening to cut funding and block certain actions like entrance of the country to the Schengen Zone. However Romania as member of the EU and NATO enjoys security and stability.*



**SERBIA:** February 5<sup>th</sup>, several opposition parties and movements held on Sunday a protest in front of the headquarters of the Radio-Television of Serbia (RTS). They accused the public service of regularly breaking the law, and blocking the opposition. None of the opposition leaders who showed up including Dragan Djilas, Boris Tadic, Zoran Zivkovic, Vuk Jeremic, Sasa Jankovic, and Sanda Raskovic-Ivic spoke at the gathering. Instead, the protest was addressed by public figures and members of opposition parties and movements, among them former RTS journalist Rade Radovanovic, author Dusan Kovacevic, and Professor Rade Veljanski. Protesters asked from RTS General Director Dragan Bujosevic, news Editor-in-Chief Nenad Lj. Stefanovic, and Chairman of the Executive Board Vladimir Vuletic to resign. The protest was organized after a meeting between representatives of opposition parties and the RTS where opposition expressed its requests related to respecting media laws and standards, but an agreement was not reached. The ruling Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka – SNS) reacted to the protest saying that the

opposition “*had sent an ugly picture of Serbia to the world.*” (www.b92.net, www.tanjug.rs)

- February 8<sup>th</sup>, MPs of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party (Srpska Radikalna Stranka – SRS) in the Assembly of Serbia's province of Vojvodina have collected more than 30,000 signatures supporting the opening of another Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Centre in Vojvodina alongside the one in Nis. “*Vojvodina needs a serious center for emergency intervention in case of natural disasters, fire and floods, like the Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Center in Nis, which is without doubt the best humanitarian centre in this part of Europe,*” Radical Deputy Djuradj Jaksic said. “*Three of our MPs went to visit the Centre in Nis last summer and got support to launch the campaign,*” he added. The document submitted to the Vojvodina Assembly requests from the Serbian authorities to agree with Russia's Ministry for Emergency Situations to open a new centre in Vojvodina. The centre in Nis opened in 2012. Russia insists that it is involved only in the provision of “*an emergency humanitarian response, the prevention of natural disasters, technological accidents, and the elimination of their consequences.*” However, the U.S has voiced fears that the centre in Nis could be used for espionage purposes as well. Half of its staff is Russians. Djuradj Jaksic told Balkan Investigative Reporting Network that he expects the other parties in the Vojvodina Assembly to “*Show political wisdom, maturity, determination, and support this initiative.*” (www.balkaninsight.com)

- February 9<sup>th</sup>, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic did not rule out the possibility of referendum regarding Kosovo issue. The new European Union strategy on Western Balkans,

which opens the possibility for Serbia to become an EU member state in 2025, has signaled that “*Time has come for us to make decisions,*” the President announced. Vucic stressed that his duty is to deliver his “*Proposals for resolving serious problems*”; however, “*It is on the citizens of Serbia to decide whether they (proposals) are good or not,*” he added. “*The decision is not on us (government), it is on citizens, and we will not be able to go against the will of the people; the citizens of Serbia will have to say what they think - how they see the future of our beautiful country,*” the President said. The EU demands from Serbia to reach a legally binding agreement with Kosovo as the main precondition for the accession of both Serbia and Kosovo into the EU. Earlier this week, the Union's enlargement commissioner, Johannes Hahn reiterated in Belgrade that the EU “*does not want to import bilateral disputes*” from the Western Balkans countries. (www.balkaney.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

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



**SLOVENIA:** February 5<sup>th</sup>, a bill on the implementation of collective cultural rights of ethnic groups from the former Yugoslavia in Slovenia was put forward by the ruling coalition

Modern Centre Party (Stranka modernega centra – SMC) and the opposition LEFT (Levica) has opened a debate on all minorities in Slovenia and their rights. Presentation of the bill last week prompted the German speaking community in debate on protection of the few members of the Italian and Hungarian communities living on the border on the one hand, and all other ethnic groups including Croats, Serbs, Jews, and Roma on the other. The balance of the already existing ethnic minorities in Slovenia somehow it was overturned by new ethnic communities of Serbs, Albanians, Bosnians, Montenegrins, “Macedonians”, and Croats. That is a potential 200,000 people. It is not really new given that they live here for two to three generations and almost half a century. But they have not been here for a century or more as some other “old” minorities. Ethnic communities which already enjoy the official status of a minority are disappointed. Hungary has already expressed concerns over the fact that some other minority would enjoy constitutional rights that the Hungarian and Italian minorities enjoy in Slovenia. Meanwhile the Austrian Government raised its voice advocating the rights of the German minority in Slovenia and south Tyrol, Italy. Croatia asks for more rights for the Croatian minority in Slovenia arguing that Slovenian minority enjoys certain constitutional rights in Croatia. (www.dnevnik.si, www.sta.si)

- February 10<sup>th</sup>, the President Borut Pahor will pay an official visit to Kosovo on February 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018 to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the state’s independence. Talks with Kosovo top officials will focus on the EU perspective of Kosovo and the Western Balkans in general. The President will also visit the Slovenian troops in the country. According to the President’s office

Pahor will meet the Kosovo President Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, Parliament Speaker Kadri Veseli as well as opposition leaders. He will also address the Parliament as part of an honorary session. In his talks with Kosovo officials he will be briefed on the country’s progress towards its Euro-Atlantic integration, while he will be pledged for Slovenia’s continuous support towards Kosovo’s biggest challenges. Pahor and Kosovo officials are expected to discuss also the security situation in Kosovo which has deteriorated since the assassination of the Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic. Relations between Slovenia and Kosovo are traditionally good with no major issues. Slovenia was among the first countries which recognized Kosovo as an independent state in March 2008 after it declared independence on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008. (www.total-slovenia-news.com, www.sta.si)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Tension with Croatia remains exclusively at political level. Although there are political voices calling for dialogue Slovenia looks fully determined to implement the arbitration award acting unilaterally. The “war” of fines against fishermen of both countries furthermore deteriorates relations between them. Security situation is closely monitored.*



**TURKEY:** February 6<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup>, Turkey's Operation “OLIVE BRANCH” launched against the Kurdish Democratic Union Party/People's Protection Units (PYD/YPG) militia in Afrin, recent developments in Syria and the war against terror were discussed in a security meeting chaired by President Recep Tayyip

Erdogan in Ankara, Turkey, with the support of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), launched Operation "OLIVE BRANCH" on January 20th, 2018 with the stated aim of clearing YPG (and Daesh terrorists) fighters from Syria's northwestern city of Afrin. According to the Turkish General Staff, the ongoing operation aims to secure northern Syria's border region with Turkey and protect the civilian population from YPG forces. The advance into Afrin so far has not been as fast as expected despite the seizure of a number of places, including some critical terrains, from the Kurdish militants. A very small town, over 30 villages, and 13 strategic hills have been captured until now in the operation, according to Turkish media reports. The YPG is estimated to have some 8,000 to 10,000 fighters in Afrin. But the Turkish troops, backed by the estimated 22,000-strong FSA have been attacking the YPG from three sides. Thirty-two Turkish soldiers and 43 FSA militants have so far been killed in the fighting, while at least 1,141 Kurdish militants have been "neutralized," according to official data. Top Turkish officials have repeatedly said Ankara would move next to drive the Kurdish militia out of Syria's Manbij, where the U.S. troops are based, and send troops to Idlib now under control of jihadist groups. However the U.S. Lieutenant General Paul E. Funk paid a visit to the U.S. forces in Manbij, saying the U.S. would continue to support Syrian Democratic Forces' (SDF) allies, despite tension with Turkey and that a continued U.S. presence in Syria's north is aimed at deescalating tensions, implying that the U.S. may fight against Turkey in Manbij in case of a possible operation. *"I don't worry,"* Funk said when asked about Turkey's claim to move toward Manbij, *"It's not in my job description to worry. My job is to fight."*

([www.aa.com.tr](http://www.aa.com.tr), [www.dailysabah.com](http://www.dailysabah.com),  
[www.hurriyetdailynews.com](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com))

- February 9<sup>th</sup>, the Chief of Turkish Armed Forces General Staff General Hulusi Akar made a harsh announcement against Greece and Turkish-Greek bilateral ties. Visiting the ground forces based in Izmir, Akar said: *"We are trying in every way to make the Aegean a sea of peace, friendship and cooperation. We want the existing problems in the Aegean to be resolved in the context of good neighborliness. On the other hand, our Armed Forces, which have a deterrent effect, are determined to support our rights and interests derived from International Treaties and international law in all our seas. We do not only control the Kardak [Imia] islets but the whole Aegean Sea. At the same time, due to our operation in Afrin, we are able to control both the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea."* Earlier on, Akar was onboard a Turkish airborne warning and control aircraft and according to Turkish media the flight was over the Aegean. His statement and his flight are considered to be an official "answer" to the flight of the Greek Admiral Evangelos Apostolakis, Chief of the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (HNDGS) and Lieutenant General Christos Christodoulou, Chief of the of the Hellenic Air Force General Staff, on February 6th, 2018 with fighter jets MIRAGE 2005 over the maritime zone of Imia as well as to the Greek minister of Defense, Panos Kammenos who had tried to get close to the islets and pay tribute by throwing a wreath to sea, to the three Greek officers who died there in 1996. Throughout his visit, Akar was accompanied by Generals Yasar Guler, Head of ground forces, Adnan Ozbal, Head of the Navy, and Hasan Kucukakyuz, Chief of the Air Force. Earlier on, they had all together visited Turkish



military units on the border with Syria.  
(www.balkaneu.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :


*Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. The new extension of the country's state of emergency maintains or even strengthens the abnormality of current political life. The country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of persecution of citizens. In southeastern region of the country there is an ongoing armed conflict between the state's security forces and Kurd guerillas. Turkey has engaged in a military operation against Kurds in Syrian borders invading in fact in Syrian territory with unknown repercussions for the state. It seems that Turkish Armed Forces face strong defense reaction from the Kurdish Forces and progress of the operation is limited. It is estimated that the military campaign may last until the end of spring. It seems rather difficult to extend the operation to Manbij not only because the U.S is reacted, but also because the Turkish Armed Forces appears trapped in Afrin. Moreover the U.S – Turkey relations are reaching a critical point which may turn into a direct confrontation; a scenario which is not very possible.*


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### NOTE

 Stable situation. No security risk

 Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored

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

 Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk

 Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict