



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

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

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

“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE

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

Copyright © 2021

“HERMES” Institute for Foreign Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy

All rights reserved



ALBANIA: January 14th, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Palmer stated that Albania and Northern Macedonia have met the conditions set by the EU. (www.exit.al)

- January 15th, Prime Minister Edi Rama has promised to provide Albanians with non-stop running water within one year starting from his third mandate, if he wins the April 2021 elections. (www.exit.al)

- January 17th, a mini crisis was erupted between Albania and France following the Prime Minister, Edi Rama's criticism against the EU and Paris for their handling of the vaccination process. Rama claimed that France has in stock vaccines that could have been used by other countries. The French Embassy in Tirana has issued a protest against Rama's statements. However, Rama clarified that he is grateful for the EU and France's support but he underlined that he does not change any of his words. (www.tiranatimes.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Within a "toxic" political atmosphere the Government seeks to forward reforms. Function of Constitutional and Supreme Court is indeed a success but there are other major issues that should be implemented. For instance the "anti-defamation" law and secure of electronic media freedom. The Prime Minister, Edi Rama's statements criticizing the EU and France for the vaccination process has provoked the fury reaction of Paris. Rama's reaction is considered as populist trick targeting the Albanian voters! The US administration is pushing openly the EU

for scheduling the first intergovernmental conference with Albania (and North Macedonia) signaling the beginning of the accession talks between the two countries and Brussels. However, it is considered that Albania has not fulfilled yet the 15 conditions were set by the EU. Corruption, organized crime, money laundering, drug and weapon smuggling, impunity and links between politics and organized crime are the main problems Albania should address effectively.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

January 11th, the House of Peoples of the Parliament of Bosnia's Federation (FBiH) entity approved the Draft Budget for 2021 in the amount of 5,481,251,899 Bosnian marks (some 2.7 billion Euros) by a majority vote at Monday's session. The 2021 budget is 27.7 million Bosnian marks (some 13.8 million Euros) lower than last year's. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 11th, the Lower Chamber of Bosnia's State Parliament rejected on Monday the dismissal of the Council of Ministers that was initiated by the opposition MPs. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- January 12th, Republika Srpska (RS), Bosnia's Serb-dominated entity will not change its earlier position that no migrant camp will be built on its territory, BiH Serb Presidency Chairman Milorad Dodik told EU's Foreign and Security Policy High Representative Josep Borell, Srna news agency reported Tuesday. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- September 15th, the European Commission warned Bosnia and Herzegovina on Friday that the unresolved situation regarding the hundreds of migrants stranded in Bosnia's northwest without

adequate accommodation could have a negative impact on the country's aspirations to join the EU. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Federal Bosnian politics avoided a new crisis following opposition's request for the dismissal of current Council of Ministers. Apart from that the 2021 budget was adopted in an important step towards state's function. Migration and the avoidance of a potential major humanitarian crisis is the most important problem the country has to resolve. The EU increases its rhetoric against Bosnia for not resolving the problem adequately underlying that inefficiency and inertia will bring consequences for the country namely it will harass its European path. However, the Republika Srpska leader, Milorad Dodik appears intransigent for the Bosnian Serb entity to accept migration camps in its territory. Migration problem highlights lack of coherence, mutual support and solidarity between the constituent entities of the country. The country is in the middle of geopolitical games between the EU and NATO on the one side and Russia on the other. Currently Bosnia is the "weak link" among Balkan states for Russian influence.



BULGARIA: January 13th, according to the Minister of Finance, Kiril Ananiev Bulgaria is expected to join the Eurozone by 2024. "The main tasks of the Bulgarian Government on the way to achieving this goal are related to the fulfillment of the subsequent commitments under the Roadmap after the accession of the Bulgarian Lev to ERM II, as of July 10th, 2020," Ananiev said. (www.novinite.com)

- January 14th, President Rumen Radev announced the date of the parliamentary elections in spring during his extraordinary address to nation. The vote will take place on April 4th, 2021 for which the Head of State has already signed a decree. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The President, Rumen Radev announced that parliamentary elections will be held on April 4th, 2021. Ruling majority and opposition are polarizing political atmosphere rejecting any idea of cooperation and consensus for electoral amendments. It should be noted that Radev is partly responsible for political tension since he failed to act as the leader of the state which guarantees its unity and political stability acting more or less as the opposition leader. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles for the country's development and should be addressed decisively; besides these are the reasons for social reaction and unrest. Modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc). Military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards despite the F-16 acquisition (not operational yet) and MIG-29 upgrade (not completed yet).



CROATIA: January 13th, President Zoran Milanovic said on Wednesday it was a shame that post-war housing reconstruction had been botched, but that this was not a matter for the State Prosecutor's Office (DORH). (www.hr.n1info.com)

- January 14th, the GEN energy company, which operates the Slovenian half of the Krsko nuclear power plant on behalf of the Government, earned a gross profit of 56 million Euros last year, exceeding its business plan, CEO Martin Novsak told a press conference on Thursday. The Krsko nuclear power plant, located in the east of Slovenia near the border with Croatia, is co-owned by GEN Energija and the Croatian state-owned power company HEP. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █ :

The country is trying to recover from the 6.2 Richter scale earthquake in Sisak - Moslavina County (central-east Croatia) which has created an emergency situation. The Government of Andrej Plenkovic is strong enjoying stability. The country's main goal is to achieve accession in Eurozone and Schengen area. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: January 11th, relations between the Government and Auditor-General Odysseas Michaelides are deteriorating, President Nicos Anastasiades has said, accusing the official of allowing himself to be “*weaponised*” by the opposition. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 11th, Leaders of both communities met with UN secretary-general's special envoy, Jane Holl Lute, on Monday, laying the groundwork for a possible informal five-party meeting. President Nikos Anastasiades expressed his readiness to participate in the informal five-party summit within the framework of the UNSG's letter of

October 26th, 2020. Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar reiterated his view that times have changed and that a two-state solution is the answer, adding “*Cyprus is no longer the old Cyprus.*” (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 12th, Cyprus and the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday signed their first military cooperation agreement as the eastern Mediterranean island nation seeks to bolster relations with nearby countries in the Middle East. (www.defensenews.com)

- January 14th, a meeting of the National Council, the country's top advisory body, took place at the Presidential Palace, to discuss developments on the Cyprus issue, following a meeting of President Nicos Anastasiades with UN Special Envoy, Jane Holl Lute last Monday. Deputy Government Spokesman Panayiotis Sentonas said after the meeting that Anastasiades suggested the members of the National Council escort him to the five-party summit, “*as this is a crucial meeting on the Cyprus issue.*” (www.cyprus-mail.com)



Meeting of National Council

(Photo source: www.presidency.gov.cy)

- January 15th, Cyprus could default if the revised budget is rejected anew by Parliament and it loses

its investment grade rating, Finance Minister Constantinos Petrides said on Friday. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

“Diplomacy” of hydrocarbons and research vessels is followed by a possible resumption of talks between Cyprus, Turkish Cypriot community, Greece, Turkey and UK under the UN auspices. Tension has been reduced in the region lately since Turkey has been withdrawn its research vessels. However, aggressive rhetoric is continued by the Turkish side. Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades has declared his readiness to join talks for a potential resolution of the Cypriot question in the context of a bicomunal, bizonal federation with increased competencies in the constituent communities. On the other hand, Turkey and Turkish Cypriot community has hardened its stance by declaring that the only solution is two sovereign states. It is obvious that there is a huge gap between the two sides. According to UN sources the informal five-party meeting is scheduled for February 2021. It is certain that Turkey will not accept “fait accompli” in a region considered as part of its strategic interests. Anastasiades is under pressure in internal politics due to his conflict with Audit-General regarding the latter’s investigation on the “investment citizenship” case. The Government refused to provide access to the Audit-General claiming that it is out of his duties such an investigation. Opposition DIKO has blocked adoption of 2021 state budget due to this conflict putting at risk the state’s economics. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize) and it reinforce it with modern systems such as UAVs. As long as

part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security and sovereignty.



GREECE: January 11th, the new, 61st round of exploratory talks between Athens and Ankara over territorial claims in the Mediterranean Sea will start on January 25th, 2021 in Istanbul, Greece’s Foreign Ministry announced on Monday evening. Greece hopes that talks with Turkey will restart from where they left off in March 2016, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Monday. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 12th, EU leaders will be discussing a proposal at the next European Council for a coronavirus “vaccination certificate” that would help ease travel among member-states, as put forward by Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 14th, Greek lawmakers approved the purchase of 18 Dassault-made RAFALE jets from France for 2.5 billion Euros on Thursday, in a deal due to be signed by the Greek and French Defense Ministers later this month. The agreement for six new and 12 used Rafale jets is expected to be signed by France and Greece in Athens this month and the first deliveries are expected during the first half of the year, the Government has said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 15th, Greece is legally bound by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and EU law – the bloc has signed and ratified UNCLOS – in any talks with Turkey on the delimitation of maritime zones, Foreign Minister

Nikos Dendias said Friday.
(www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █:

Tension in the Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean has eased after Turkey has withdrawn its research vessels and has shown that it is ready to sit on the table of talks. There is not much to expect in exploratory talks after 61 rounds of them. The two countries have discussed almost everything in these rounds and both sides know very well the each other's arguments. First of all the two parts have to agree on the agenda; not an easy work. According to Greek Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Greece is willing to talk only for delimitation of maritime zones, while Turkey seeks to broaden the list with other issues (demilitarization of Aegean islands, grey zones, Muslim minority in Thrace etc). Following escalation of tension with Turkey during last summer, Greece seeks to strengthen its Armed Forces. In this context, the Parliament has approved purchase of 18 RAFALE 4th generation fighter jets which give a significant advantage of air superiority in the Aegean Sea. According to the Government new frigates purchase will follow, while increase of military service and hire of contract soldiers will resolve the manning of the Armed Forces. It seems that despite its readiness for talks with Turkey, Greece has learned its lesson from the last crisis investing in military competencies.



KOSOVO: January 11th, Kosovo's acting Prime Minister, Avdullah Hoti, hosted Monday political representatives of Albanians living in Presheva Valley and promised sending them schoolbooks with the new school year in

September. Hoti warned that Kosovo might reintroduce reciprocity with Serbia if Belgrade authorities try to ban sending Albanian schoolbooks to the Presheva Valley.
(www.gazetaexpress.com)

- September 12th, the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) led by Isa Mustafa and New Kosovo Alliance (Aleanca Kosova e Re - AKR) of Behgjet Pacolli are expected to enter a pre-electoral coalition and run under one list in upcoming election set to be held on February 14th, 2021. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 13th, President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli, said that fighting crime and corruption brings Kosovo closer to the EU. A day after meeting acting President Vjosa Osmani, Sassoli wrote in social media that he is glad to see Kosovo committed to reforms. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 14th, the Vetevendosje (Self-Determination) and Civic Initiative led by the Kosovo acting President, Vjosa Osmani signed Thursday an agreement on cooperation for upcoming February 14th, 2021 election. Osmani, have announced that Vetevendosje leader, Albin Kurti will run for Prime Minister whereas the Vetevendosje will propose Osmani as candidate for President's post. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT █:

Kosovo political parties are getting prepared for the coming elections on February 14th, 2021. Pre-electoral alliances have emerged between political forces seeking to increase their power. Cooperation between the strongest political force

(vetevendosje) in the dissolved Parliament and political movement of the former LDK member and acting President, Vjosa Osmani is notable. What Kosovo needs to move forward is political stability. Current uncertainty affects not only dialogue with Serbia but also state's reforms. Belgrade – Pristina talks have frozen due to the latter's snap elections. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish rule of law and modern functional administration. Moreover, corruption, organized crime, links between politicians and organized crime and inadequate justice system together with Kosovo unresolved status are significant obstacles towards the establishment of rule of law allowing Pristina to move ahead in its Euro-Atlantic path.



MOLDOVA: January 11th, President Maia Sandu submitted today a notification to the Constitutional Court (CCM), thereby demanding “*the verification of the constitutionality of more laws which limit the country's President and the outgoing Government in exercising their powers.*” (www.moldpres.md)

- January 12th, the President of Moldova Maia Sandu and the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenski set up the Council of the Presidents of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine as a new permanent high-level cooperation format. According to Sandu, this is an important step towards establishing strategic relations. This permanent interaction mechanism will help to work out policies and strategies, to solve the problems from bilateral agenda and to monitor implementation of the reached agreements. (www.ipn.md)

- January 15th, the acting President of the Action and Solidarity Party (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate - PAS) Igor Grosu admits that the Constitutional Court's solution concerning the self-dissolution of Parliament can be applied only for the next legislative bodies, not yet for the current one. Even so, the MP is confident that snap parliamentary elections will take place this year, IPN reports. According to Grosu, Snap elections could take place at end of May or start of June. (www.ipn.md)

- January 16th, President Maia Sandu said she has a team that could form a very good Cabinet, but the lack of a parliamentary majority that would support the new executive prevents her from nominating candidates for Prime Minister, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)



The President of Moldova, Maia Sandu
(Photo source: www.presedinte.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Following the election of Maia Sandu as Moldova's President, the country has entered in a period of political instability and uncertainty. Sandu is seeking to oust the PSRM Government acknowledging that her power to change the former President, Igor Dodon's regime in the country is limited without controlling the cabinet

and the Parliament's majority. Consequently, she is working methodically to dissolve the Parliament and to call snap elections. Constitutional Court has a central and critical role in this "game" since decisions not only of the President, but also of political parties are moving in the edge of constitutional order. In other words, the struggle for political dominance is sacrificing Moldova's stability. Sandu is enjoying the western world support and it might push for economic assistance in order to strengthen her position in the country. PSRM and PDM seek to avoid snap elections in the near future (namely spring or summer) aiming to "gain ground" and to go for an electoral victory in the autumn or winter. The newly elected President paid her first visit in abroad to Ukraine sending a strong symbolic message about her foreign policy orientation. She spoke for a "strategic relation" with Ukraine showing that Russia may lose influence in Moldova. Under current conditions with a country in a dramatic economic situation, high rate of corruption, weak public administration, problematic rule of law and justice, situation may become even worse for Moldovans. The "Transnistrian case" is always a "running sore" for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: January 11th, "Elektromreza Srbije" EMS, today bought the additional 5% of shares of the Montenegrin Electric Transmission System, CGES, on the stock exchange for nearly 7 million Euros, Blic reported. The Serbian company has now taken a total of 15% of ownership in CGES. (www.cdm.me)

- January 13th, Montenegro's President, Milo Djukanovic, has announced today that he will not sign the Proposals for the dismissal of the Chief of the General Staff of the Army of Montenegro, Major General Dragutin Dakic and Major General Rajko Pesic, which were submitted to him earlier, because the applicable regulations were not complied with. Instead, as he announced, he will convene a session of the Defense and Security Council. (www.cdm.me)

- January 15th, Government's strategic commitment is for Montenegro to be the first next member of the EU. We must act accordingly. So, the framework for membership is 2025, and that means a task for all our institutions to have legislation fully harmonized with the "acquis communautaire" by the end of 2023, and our institutions ready in administrative and infrastructural terms to fully implement the acquis, said the Chief Negotiator with the EU, Zorka Kordic. (www.cdm.me)

- January 15th, President of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic, Parliament Speaker, Aleksa Becic, Prime Minister, Zdravko Krivokapic, and Deputy Prime Minister, Dritan Abazovic, met today to discuss issues important for the Government, the opposition and all citizens of Montenegro – the functionality of the state, institutions and cohabitation. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Struggle between the new Government and President could become detrimental for the country. Montenegro faces a serious problem of political functionality since the President is seeking to block any of the Government's initiatives to change the rule that DPS has set

during last 30 years. It could be claimed that Montenegro has entered into a transition process which may affect the state's progress and growth. Besides, the country is in a transition process towards its foreign policy since it is not a secret that the new Government is pro-Serbian and pro-Russian. Currently, none of the ruling majority will admit such allegation, but it is expected that the pro-Serbian/pro-Russian bloc will unveil its real goals when it will consolidate its power. Nowadays, it is the phase of the struggle for power. This struggle has already started to affect critical state institutions such as the Armed Forces. The Government has dismissed the Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff but the President does not decree the Government's decision. Of course one should take into consideration that control of the Armed Forces is a sensitive issue touching NATO as well. Under current circumstances Montenegro could be developed into the "fragile link" in the Balkans. The western international community is closely monitoring the Montenegrin political situation. Montenegro needs concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability in order to become a stable and attractive investment environment. Montenegro is closer to the EU accession than any other Western Balkan country but current political situation puts at risk its European future.



NORTH MACEDONIA: January 11th, according to the Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani, North Macedonia does not have yet a clear view on Bulgaria's approach on the Action Plan proposed by Skopje for resolving all disputes

between the two countries. Osmani believes that Bulgarians need more time to go through the Action Plan more carefully and "we will have a clearer position after that," the Minister said. (www.mia.mk)

- January 13th, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) demands that the draft law on the census be withdrawn immediately from the parliamentary debate and that the ruling majority organize an intra-party and intra-state debate with all social factors in order to find a consensual solution on how to conduct this statistical operation. (www.mia.mk)

- January 15th, the Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev claimed that the country should not depend only in one gas supplier which might monopolize the market. According to him, North Macedonia could import gas from Azerbaijan or the US. Zaev expressed the state's interest to join the construction of the Alexandroupolis gas pipeline, a geostrategic project supported by the US. (www.mia.mk)

- January 17th, Friday afternoon, after three days, Parliament ended the debate on the Draft-Law on Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in North Macedonia, according to which, after 19 years, the country should perform this statistical act. The Draft Law will be voted on at the continuation of this session, which will be additionally scheduled. (www.mia.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

North Macedonia's dispute with Bulgaria on identity and language issues has damaged the opening of accession talks of Skopje with the EU. The country has presented an Action Plan seeking to resolve the disputed issues but messages from Bulgaria are not encouraging. North Macedonia is trapped and good neighborly relations are proved to be critical for the country's European future. However, the recent visit of the Foreign Minister, Bujar Osmani in Athens where he met Greek top officials confirmed the good bilateral relations between the two countries following the "Prespa" agreement. Besides, North Macedonia promotes its participation in the Alexandroupolis gas pipeline under the US support giving a strategic dimension in the Athens – Skopje cooperation. The census bill has become a new filed for political dispute between the Government and opposition. Zaev and SDSM are ready to conduct the first census of the country after 20 years. Opposition VMRO-DPMNE is against the bill and is trying to collect signatures to challenge the law. Census in the country is a sensitive issue since it will unveil the size of the Albanian entity which may become a reason for major administrative and political changes in North Macedonia. VMRO-DPMNE is insisting on maintaining a nationalistic and populist rhetoric seeking to gain more votes.



ROMANIA: January 13th,

Romania's President Klaus Iohannis commented on Tuesday on the alleged tensions between the two main parties in the ruling coalition, saying that it's "absolutely normal to have different views within the governing coalition." He added that he saw no disputes between the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL), the

reformist alliance Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România -USR) - Party of Liberty, Unity and Solidarity (Partidul Libertate, Unitate și Solidaritate - PLUS), and the ethnic Hungarians' party Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România - UDMR) - but only discussions. (www.romania-insider.com)

- January 14th, leader of Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD), Marcel Ciolacu announced in a post on social media that his party would come up with its budget alternative. Ciolacu's announcement came as the Constitutional Court ruled against the law that increases pensions by 40% on Wednesday, January 13th, 2021. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The newly elected ruling coalition consisted of three parties - PNL, UDMR and USR-PLUS – is facing problems of communication and cooperation. According to the President, Klaus Iohannis it is not about disputes but only disagreements; a natural phenomenon in coalition Governments. Opposition PSD is taking advantage of ruling majority disagreements and with the confidence of the victory in the recent parliamentary elections is trying to influence state politics and to interfere in legislative initiatives. 2021 state budget has not adopted yet and is a challenge for the parliamentary majority. The country enjoys advanced upgrade in US and NATO strategic plans due to its geographical position located close to Russia. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO. After

redeployment of the US military forces from Germany, Romania is upgrading into the advanced bastion of NATO against Russia. Consequently, Russia reacts in this close military cooperation between the two countries and the Alliance perceiving it as a threat against its national security.



SERBIA: January 13th, Petar Petkovic, the Head of Serbia's Government Office for Kosovo, said on Wednesday that Belgrade advocated a compromise with Pristina, adding the two parts should *"meet half-way so that neither side gets or loses everything."* (www.rs.n1info.com)

- January 17th, the Serbian Parliament Speaker, Ivica Dacic speaking for the intra-party dialogue stressed that *"if someone understands dialogue as the wishes and greetings of the listeners or expects that it will bring them a transitional Government; they are on the wrong path."* He did not miss to say that recommendations of the OSCE's ODIHR mission will be respected in the next elections, but that all decisions will still be made by the Government of Serbia. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Europe is pushing Serbia for starting the intra-party dialogue seeking to normalize political situation in the country towards more democratic practices, consolidation of the rule of law and freedom of expression. The Serbian ruling majority perceives this process as an interference of foreign actors in state's politics and it is not really willing of starting this process. There are also top officials – like the Parliament Speaker,

Ivica Dacic – who believe that intra-party dialogue seeks to destabilize the country or even topple the Government. The country enjoys an upgrade in its regional influence after the political change in Montenegro where a pro-Serbian Government has been established. Kosovo – Serbia dialogue is on hold after political instability in Pristina and the early elections scheduled for February 14th, 2021. Serbia pays special attention in improving operational capabilities of its Armed Forces declaring towards all sides that they are the power of the state. It implements an ambitious armament program mainly supported by Russia.



SLOVENIA: January 11th, the Constitutional Court said it had stayed the implementation of a law on 780 million Euros in investments in the Slovenian Armed Forces in 2021 - 2026 pending its final decision on the law's constitutionality. If it turned out the act is unconstitutional, the consequences of its implementation would be more severe than if it is stayed for a relatively short time until it has reached its decision, the Court said. The Defense Ministry labeled the decision as *"disproportionate."* (www.sta.si)

- January 12th, four MPs of the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije - DeSUS), which left the Government coalition in December, will contribute their signatures in support of a motion of no-confidence in the Janez Jansa Government, DeSUS leader Karl Erjavec announced. This means the informal Constitutional Arch Coalition (KUL), which brings together five left-leaning parties in a bid to oust the Government, has 43 votes secured. (www.sta.si)

- January 15th, an informal coalition of center-left opposition parties filed a motion of no confidence in the Janez Jansa Government with the backing of 42 of the 90 Deputies of the National Assembly. (www.sta.si)

- January 15th, Slovenia wants to buy an Alenia C-27J Spartan military transport aircraft made by Leonardo under a Government-to-Government contract with Italy, the Slovenian Defense Ministry said. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Janez Jansa Government is enjoying a fragile stability which is threatened by a coalition of center-left parties which seek to topple it. The informal Constitutional Arch Coalition (KUL) has filed a motion of no confidence of the Government which enjoys support of 42 MPs in the 90 seats Parliament. However, it is unlikely the opposition to get four more votes to topple the ruling majority. The issue of illegal migration keeps on being a “headache” for state’s authorities and security forces. The Slovenian Armed Forces face problems mainly in the field of modern equipment and manning. Their operational readiness is under question and it is assessed that they cannot accomplish their mission. However, the ambitious economic project of 780 million Euros for strengthening the Armed Forces is currently on hold due to Constitutional Court decision until it receives its final verdict on constitutionality of the relevant law.



TURKEY: January 11th, the United Arab Emirates is willing to normalize its relations with Turkey, the UAE state Minister for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash said late Sunday. Noting

that there are no grounds for problems between nations, Gargash urged Ankara to end its “*support to the Muslim Brotherhood and restore its relations*” with the Arab world. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 11th, sovereign equality must be negotiated and there must be a two-state solution on the island of Cyprus, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Monday in a joint news conference in the capital Ankara with the Turkish Cypriot so-called “*foreign minister,*” Tahsin Ertugruloglu. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 11th, Turkey and Greece will resume the suspended exploratory talks about territorial claims in the Mediterranean Sea and other issues on January 25th, 2021 in Istanbul, Turkey’s Foreign Ministry said. (www.aljazeera.com)

- January 11th, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said he wants to improve relations with the European Union, following a longstanding dispute with Greece and recent feuds with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron. During a televised meeting with EU ambassadors on Tuesday, Erdogan softened some of his toughest rhetoric and took a conciliatory tone. (www.aljazeera.com)

- January 14th, the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Pakistan issued a joint declaration Wednesday following the Second Round of Trilateral Dialogue of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs which was held in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad. The three Ministers declared their agreement on strengthening cooperation in various fields such as peace, security, and human rights (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 14th, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said that preventing Turkey's return to the F-35 program could cause serious damage to the relations between Ankara and Washington. Akar also noted that Turkey wants to return the F-35 scheme, which was excluded from the multinational stealth fighter jet program by the U.S., adding that such actions will cause a serious "confidence crisis" between the two countries. (www.aljazeera.com)

- January 14th, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar has called on the upcoming Biden administration in the United States to engage in a dialogue with Ankara and to review a decision to sanction the country over its purchase of an advanced Russian air missile defense system. (www.aljazeera.com)

- January 15th, talks with Russia on the procurement of the second batch of S-400 are set to continue as planned, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Friday, underlining that it will not allow its defense decisions to be dictated by another country. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Election of Joe Biden and changes of governance in the US has forced Turkey to change its current policy. Of course, the threat of sanctions in the coming March by the EU has also contributed in this change of Turkish behavior. In short, Turkey has soften its rhetoric against the EU member states such as Cyprus, France and Greece stopping its provocative actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea. Exploratory talks with Greece will be held on January 25th, 2021 in an effort to de-escalate tension by both sides. Turkey seeks to broaden the agenda of talks with

a variety of issues and not only delimitation of sea zones as Greece says. Simultaneously, Turkey appears positive in normalizing its relation with the EU in an effort to gain supporters within the organization. Besides, it is not a secret that several EU member states are in favor of a closer and more tolerant relation with Turkey. The country has built a strong strategic relation with Azerbaijan and Pakistan; it could be described as an "axis" since the three countries have developed strong ties in the field of defense and security. Taking into consideration the strong strategic relation of Turkey with Qatar it could be said that the country enjoys upgraded regional role in Middle East, Caucasus and North Africa. None could ignore Turkey in regional level and this is confirmed not only by the fact that Turkey has military presence in several fronts in the region but also that joins several political and diplomatic initiatives for resolving ongoing conflicts. The Turkish – US relations are the biggest challenge Ankara has to deal nowadays. It is assessed that the Biden administration will harden its stance against Turkey but Turkish diplomacy will do what it knows better than anyone; it will negotiate for everything. Turkey knows very well that it is an integral part of the US security architecture and actually there is no sustainable security system in Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean, and North Africa without Turkey as an ally. In the Cypriot front, Turkey openly promotes the solution of two sovereign states seeking to divide the island. The country continues to face several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs, Mayors, journalists and thousands of citizens are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with


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


www.hermesresearch.eu


email: info@hermesresearch.eu


Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas


NOTE

 *Stable situation. No security risk.*

 *Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored.*

 *Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions. Low tension incidents.*

 *Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. Violent incidents or armed violence in specific regions. Ongoing tension or crisis. High security risk.*

 *Evolving or ongoing crisis including major armed violence or violent/armed conflict. Civil, inter-state or non –state actors war.*