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**Hermes Institute of
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SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE TO THOSE WHO SHAPE THE FUTURE

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

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

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ALBANIA: December 27th, the Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) leader, Lulzim Basha, said in an interview that the Provisory Prosecutor General is being used to close ongoing investigations destroying this way the judiciary reform which he called “hope of Albanians.” Basha claimed “They are trying to destroy the old hope of the Albanian people, the judiciary reform by destroying and compromising criminal cases against Saimir Tahiri, Vangjush Dako, the Balilaj, Habilaj and others allies of Rama’s Government.” The opposition leader added that this is not a crisis in the Prosecution, but a bigger crisis; “This is a Constitutional crisis, a Government without a popular mandate, a Parliament that has come from elections altered by drug and criminal money,” he said. (www.top-channel.tv)

BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

December 29th, institutional and functional crisis in the country is more than obvious since Bosnia's Federation entity looks likely to start 2018 without a budget as a result of chronic disputes between the ruling parties in the mainly Bosniak and Croat entity. Due to the crisis between the Federation entity's ruling parties, the [Bosniak] Party of Democratic Action (Stranka demokratske akcije – SDA), the Alliance for Better Future of Bosnia (Savez za bolju budućnost BiH) and the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - HDZ BiH) no budget for 2018 has been adopted by the entity as yet. No budget has been adopted at state level either. It means that for the first three months of 2018 temporary measures will have to be used to allow the entity to be functional. At the moment only Bosnia's Serb-dominated entity,

Republika Srpska has adopted a budget for 2018. (www.balkaninsight.com)

BULGARIA: December 28th, Bulgarian Defense Minister, Krasimir Karakachanov stated that the planned four-year framework agreement for the maintenance of 15 Bulgarian Air Force Soviet-made MiG-29 jet fighters was likely to be signed in mid-February 2018. Earlier this month, the Defense Ministry invited Russia’s RSK MiG to begin negotiations on the contract, worth 40 million Euros, hoping to close the deal before the end of the year. But the Ministry had to cancel after a Ukrainian company lodged a complaint with Bulgaria’s competition watchdog. Karakachanov, who initially described the complaint as “*sabotage*”, said that he would not “*insert intermediaries in the fighter jets contract. There will be direct talks with RSK MiG.*” (www.sofiaglobe.com)

CROATIA: December 27th, Ministry of Interior announced that about 150 migrants have been protesting for two days at the Tovarnik border checkpoint between Serbia and Croatia demanding from Croatian authorities to allow them enter the state’s territory. Croatian border Police resolved the issue in cooperation with Serbian Police and the European Commission. However, Serbia's Commissariat for Refugees of Serbia told to Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) that some NGOs had, in effect, created the problem, by wrongly informing refugees that if they protested on the border in large numbers over Christmas, the Croatian authorities would let them in. It added that this was a “*complete untruth*,” and that Croatian Police were not allowing any of them onto their territory. “*The Commissariat is constantly appealing to migrants to return to the centers*,” it

added. (www.total-croatia-news.com, www.balkaninsight.com, www.hr.n1info.com)

CYPRUS: December 28th, the SAIPEM 12000 deepwater drillship has arrived at the target in block 6 where later this week it is scheduled to commence drilling an exploratory gas well. The drillship has been leased by the consortium of ENI and TOTAL which have the license for block 6. Turkey which does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus, claims that block 6 partially falls within the outer limits of its continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean. The operations in block 6 are expected to wrap up by early February 2018, after which the drillship will almost immediately head to block 3 – also licensed to ENI – for another exploratory drill. The target in block 3 is codenamed ‘Soupia’ (cuttlefish). Also on December 26th, 2017 the Turkish research vessel BARBAROS HAYREDDIN PASA set a course for the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). (www.cyprus-mail.com)



SAIPEM 12000 deepwater drillship
(Photo source: www.saipem.com)

- December 29th, the President Nicos Anastasiades said he would not comment on Turkey’s announcement that it would begin seismic surveys

just northeast of Cyprus’ waters. What is important, he added, is that Cyprus exerts its sovereign rights implements its energy plans; *“I don’t want to pay attention (on the matter) anymore than is needed. We are a sovereign state exerting our sovereign rights. I will stop here,”* Anastasiades said. Issuing a marine notice – or Navtex – 1443/17, it outlined that Turkish research vessel BARBAROS HAYREDDIN PASA would be carrying out seismic surveys starting December 29th, 2017 until March next year. Barbaros will be accompanied by vessels M/V TANUX-1 and R/V APOLLO MOON according to the Navtex. In a statement, Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in the absence of a solution to the Cyprus problem *“it is unacceptable that the Greek Cypriot side persists in acting as though it were the sole owner of the island and continues with its unilateral hydrocarbon-related activities.”* In an effort to protect the rights of Turkish Cypriots, Turkey was preparing for various exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean including areas where Turkish Petroleum was granted exploration permits by the *“Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus,”* the statement added. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

F.Y.R.O.M: December 25th, Vice Premier Koco Angjusev said that the name issue should be solved and people should decide *“whether this is Northern, Upper, or New Macedonia. These options are all acceptable for me.”* Angjusev said that the name problem is an internal issue and relates to business because economic prosperity requires rule of law and stable political situation, namely the EU and NATO accession. *“This means a name compromise. The Government has the capacity and responsibility to discuss the topic; there are also positive signals coming from*

the international community and Greece. The Macedonian identity and language are the red lines from which there should be no concessions. Regarding the name we should incorporate a certain qualifier that would be internationally acceptable.” said Angjusev. (www.mia.mk)

- December 25th, with 61 votes “for,” one “withheld” and none “against,” the Parliament appointed Ljubomir Joveski as the new state Public Prosecutor. Joveski, who will take the place of the dismissed Marko Zvrlevski, as was stressed during the discussion is expected to return the trust in the Prosecution and the legal system in the country as a whole. The Public Prosecutor has a six year term with the right to be reappointed. The session was boycotted by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) MPs due to the detention of 6 of their colleagues as suspects in the violence that happened on April 27th, 2017 in the Parliament. (www.mia.mk, www.meta.mk)

- December 28th, Parliament Speaker, Talat Xhaferi expressed his hope that MPs from the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) will return in Parliament works starting from the session on January 9th, 2018 when the session on law on languages and election of the constitutional judges is scheduled. He underlined that the country does not need new elections in 2018 and pointed out that the political crisis in

F.Y.R.O.M ended six months ago. According to Xhaferi, the leaving of Government by the Alliance of Albanians (Aleanca për Shqiptarët) will not cause any waves to the parliamentary majority, and the quorum in Parliament does not depend on it. “I am sure that there will be a majority in 2018, all political parties will participate in Parliament, which will lead to a positive report from the European Commission in April and a date for starting pre-accession negotiations”, Xhaferi said. (www.mia.mk, www.meta.mk)



Parliament Speaker, Talat Xhaferi
(Photo source: www.sobranie.mk)

GREECE: December 28th, opposition parties urge coalition Government to clarify its position over the Greece – F.Y.R.O.M name dispute. The “To Potami” (Το Ποτάμι) party released a public statement “*We are expecting to see the position of the Government, not only of SYRIZA. There is no room for petty political games.*” Main opposition party New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) has called on the ruling coalition to strike a uniform stance with regard to the name dispute with F.Y.R.O.M or to call elections. ND’s spokesperson Maria Spyraiki said it was inconceivable for the two component parts of the coalition – leftist Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς –

SYRIZA) and right wing junior partner, the Independent Greeks (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες - ANEL) - to have different opinions on what name F.Y.R.O.M should have in the event of a solution to the decades-old dispute. *“If the Government cannot present a uniform position then there is no Government and elections should be called,”* she said predicting that 2018 will be an election year. Cracks in the coalition Government emerged over the issue due to the fact that Panos Kammenos, the leader of Independent Greeks announced that he would never back a solution including the word “Macedonia.” (www.ekathimerini.com)

- December 29th, The METEOR, a research ship conducting research on behalf of the German University of Heidelberg in the sea between Samothrace and Limnos in the Eastern Aegean Sea, was harassed by Turkish coast guard officers who warned the captain to leave, saying the vessel was in Turkish waters. The METEOR had in fact been granted all the necessary permits from the Greek Foreign and Defense Ministries, according to Greek military officials who referred to the standard Turkish tactics of questioning Greek sovereign rights in the Aegean. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- December 30th, The Greek Government filed a request with the Asylum Appeals Committee to take back a decision granting asylum to one of eight Turkish officers who fled to Greece after last summer’s failed coup in Turkey over fears of persecution. Earlier the same day the Asylum Appeals Committee that examines applications in the second degree approved a request for protection from the copilot of the helicopter that flew the eight servicemen into the northern Greek town of Alexandroupoli on July 16th, 2016, a day after the attempted takeover by the military in

Turkey. The Committee upheld an opinion from human rights groups, the Council of Europe and other international agencies decrying human rights violations in Turkey in the aftermath of the failed coup. The panel said that there is no evidence to suggest that the copilot was involved in the coup attempt, yet is nevertheless, being sought by Turkey for “political crimes” and on these grounds may not receive a fair trial if extradited. The decision was strongly criticized by Turkey which announced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs *“it will have negative impacts on bilateral relations. Greece failed to show the support and cooperation we expect from an ally in the fight against terrorism by preventing criminals who took part in killing hundreds of Turkish people and targeting the democratic order. By granting asylum to one of eight coup plotters involved in the July 15 coup, Greece has once again showed that it is a country that protects and embraces coup plotters with this decision.”* Turkey has repeatedly requested the extradition of the eight officers but the Greek Supreme Court in January 2017 turned down the request amid concerns that they would not receive a fair trial if returned to their country. (www.ekathimerini.com)

KOSOVO: December 29th, the “Self-Determination” party (Vetëvendosje) MPs, Albin Kurti and Donika Kadaj-Bujupi have been released today from the detention pending trial. Founder of the party Albin Kurti and MP Kadaj-Bujupi were detained after they failed to show up in court to face charges of letting off tear gas in the Assembly hall in December 2015 in an effort to prevent establishment of the Association of Serb-majority municipalities. Also two other “Self-Determination” MPs, Albulena Haxhiu and Faton Topalli, are accused of the

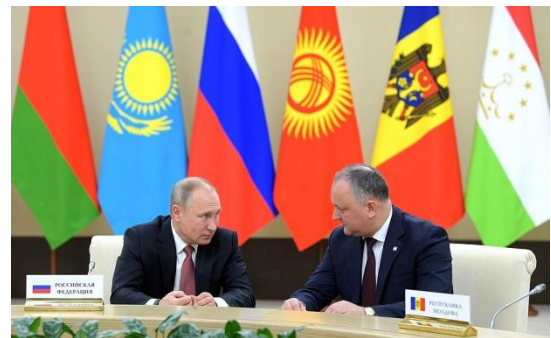
same charge. The verdict related to this case is expected on 3 January 3rd, 2018. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- December 29th, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci has signed a decree to pardon three former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) convicted of killing after the war in Kosovo in 2001 an entire family in the high-profile ‘Kiqina’ case. The three men are Arben Kiqina and brothers Arsim and Burim Ramadani, who were jailed for murdering the Hajra family in 2001, allegedly because the father of the family was a police officer under Slobodan Milosevic’s regime. A total of five men were convicted of killing the Hajra family near Drenas in central Kosovo in August 2001, all former KLA members. Burim Ramadani, Arsim Ramadani and Arben Kiqina were jailed for 30 years, Jeton Kiqina for 16 years and Blerim Kiqina for 11 years. The family died when their car came under fire from automatic weapons. Hajra’s youngest daughter was the only one who survived the attack. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- December 30th, following a statement of the US Embassy in Pristina, calling on Kosovo leaders not to repeat efforts to repeal the law on Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecution Office, the US Department of State has also reacted. The US asks Kosovo President Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and Parliament Speaker Kadri Veseli to maintain their commitment to the work of the Chambers and to leave the authorities and jurisdiction of the court unchanged. “*We call on political leaders in the Republic of Kosovo to maintain their commitment to the work of the Chambers and to leave the authorities and jurisdiction of the court unchanged,*” it is stated in a press release issued

by the US State Department. According to the press release, the United States is deeply concerned by recent attempts in the Kosovo Assembly to abrogate the law on the Specialist Chambers, the court established to hear cases of alleged crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious crimes committed during the 1998-2000 conflict. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

MOLDOVA: December 27th, President Igor Dodon attended the informal meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) heads of states which was held in Moscow. Leaders of the CIS countries summed up the results of Russia’s CIS Presidency in 2017 and exchanged views on the further development of cooperation in different areas. Dodon had a brief bilateral meeting with Putin on the sidelines of the informal summit where all aspects of bilateral relations were addressed. (www.kremlin.ru, www.moldova.org)



Russian and Moldovan Presidents’ meeting
(Photo source: www.kremlin.ru)

- December 28th, President Igor Dodon refused for second time to approve appointment of the seven new ministers appointed by the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM). His veto was motivated by the lack of integrity declarations of the newly appointed officials. As a result, a group of MPs from the

Parliament's juridical commission submitted a complaint to the Constitutional Court of Moldova asking to examine the circumstances of imposing an interim President to appoint the respective Ministers. According to the Moldovan Constitution, a President can reject a law or a decree from the Government only once with a motivation. (www.moldova.org)

MONTENEGRO: December 25th, Minister of Defense Predrag Boskovic in a meeting with journalists claimed that last year was better than successful in terms of the achieved goals. According to him in 2017 four tasks have been defined as crucial – continuation of NATO integration, modernization of the Armed Forces of Montenegro (VCG), social status of the employees and bringing the VCG formation to the level required by a modern and flexible army. Furthermore the Minister announced that in January 2018 a contract for the purchase of three new helicopters will be signed; *“Bearing in mind that, as a small country, we have to behave rationally and that we have to look at the civil interest, we have put priority on purchasing multipurpose helicopters, and that project is to be completed soon,”* Boskovic said. The contract relates to the purchase of three multifunctional helicopters that, in addition to their use in armed operations, will also have certain application for civilian purposes. The Minister said *“All three helicopters will be equipped with fire extinguishers as well as the equipment for medical transport, rescue in inaccessible areas, as well as for surveillance and control of the territory.”* Apart from that Boskovic the Ministry plans to acquire six light armoured vehicles from Germany. He also said that there was an agreement with the United

States on the purchase of a similar type of vehicle. (www.cdm.me)

ROMANIA: December 26th, the ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) proposed a series of amendments in the anti-corruption laws which will make abuse of office, bribery and influence peddling less serious offences in the country. A group of 39 PSD senators and deputies submitted on December 18th, 2017 a draft bill to change the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code and set lower penalties on several corruption offenses and even partially decriminalize some of them. The PSD-ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats - Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților) ruling coalition in Romania has embarked on a quest to change several important laws for the justice system. The Parliament has recently adopted changes to three important justice laws concerning the status of the magistrates in Romania and the way some important judiciary institutions function. These changes, which have triggered negative reactions from Romania's international partners fearing that justice independence in Romania, may be affected. (www.romania-insider.com)

SERBIA: December 28th, President Aleksandar Vucic believes that *“a more serious debate on the internal dialogue on Kosovo and Metohija will be possible in early spring.”* Vucic emphasized that the issue of Kosovo is *“very important to us, and in the internal dialogue, it is important that people speak the truth.”* *“I hope and I believe that in the future we will succeed in rationalizing our demands and our policy and preserving what belongs to our people. I believe that we will in early spring manage to go into this*

this kind of a more serious process,” concluded Vucic. (www.b92.net)



Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic
(Photo source: www.predsednik.rs)

SLOVENIA: December 30th, Slovenia formally asserts sovereignty of land and sea it was awarded by the Slovenia-Croatia border arbitration tribunal as it starts implementing the tribunal's award. Slovenia has used the six-month period of preparations for implementation as stipulated by the border arbitration agreement to draw up legislation implementing the new border line. Croatia, on the other hand, insists the arbitration procedure was compromised beyond repair by a Slovenian judge's misdeeds and considers the arbitration award null and void. Since the border was announced in June, Slovenian police were merely warning fishermen and patrol boats crossing the newly determined border line, which runs south of the median line in the Piran Bay after Slovenia was granted 80% of the bay. From today police patrols plan to start sanctioning violations. Croatian fishermen have been instructed by Croatian police to continue with business as usual, meaning fishing halfway into Piran Bay, into the area Slovenia now considers to be its territorial waters. Croatian boats are allowed to fish there, but they need to get permits from Slovenian authorities. If they

don't have permits, they will be liable for fines that can run into thousands of Euros. (www.sloveniantimes.com, www.sta.si)

TURKEY: December 27th, a group of Turkish soldiers reached a military base in Qatar's capital Doha, according to Qatar's Defense Ministry. The group arrived at the Al Udeid Air Base in southern Doha. The soldiers will join another group which previously came to Tariq bin Ziyad military base in the Gulf state. The move comes as part of a 2014 defense agreement between Doha and Ankara under which Turkey established a base in Qatar at the request of its Government. With this new group, the countries will have more military drills aimed at strengthening the defense capabilities of both countries. Turkey and Qatar's defense ties have strengthened in recent years, in line with the countries' political alliance. Turkey operates a military base in Qatar and Turkish troops are deployed to the Tariq bin Ziyad Base under an agreement signed in 2014. The base serves as a tool to develop Qatar's defense ability, fight against terrorism and supports military operations to protect international peace. Turkey and Qatar conducted a new military deal in August 2017. In addition to operating a military base in the country, Turkey also opened its largest defense investment in Qatar last month – a helicopter simulation center that will help the Gulf country train pilots. At least 1,000 pilots will be trained annually at the center that was built by Turkish defense contractor HAVELSAN at Al-Udaid. Turkey has already provided training for 55 Qatari military helicopter pilots in the past. (www.dailysabah.com)

- December 29th, Turkey's top defense procurement office confirmed that Ankara and

Moscow Governments have finalized a contract for the acquisition and deployment of the Russian S-400 long-range air and anti-missile defense system on Turkish territory. The procurement agency, the Undersecretariat for Defense Industries, or SSM, said in a statement that the contract involves the acquisition of one S-400 system with an option to purchase a second system. SM said the delivery of the S-400 system was scheduled for the first quarter of 2020. “The contract has been signed, an advance payment has been made and a financing deal has been penned. The contract includes a joint development commitment and cooperation for technological know-how.” SSM said. SSM added that the S-400 system would be operated by Turkish personnel and would be supported by a locally developed identification friend or foe, or IFF system. (www.defensenews.com)

www.hermesresearch.eu

email: info@hermesresearch.eu

Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas