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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” (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**

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**ALBANIA:** January 5<sup>th</sup>, the US Ambassador in Albania, Yuri Kim met with the new Head of the Special Prosecution Against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK), Altin Dumani to congratulate him on his new position. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

- January 7<sup>th</sup>, Albanian Chief Negotiator, Majlinda Dhuka said that Albania and the European Commission (EC) have started the analytical review process and by the end of 2023 she will have a clear overview regarding the country's accession process. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

- January 8<sup>th</sup>, the Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama has invited the leaders of North Macedonia's Albanian parliamentary parties in Tirana for a joint discussion. Meeting will be held on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and the agenda is not yet known. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

- January 8<sup>th</sup>, Albanian Defense Minister, Niko Peleshi said that the establishment of the military cyber defense unit will be completed within 2023. He emphasized that the Ministry pays special attention in this unit due to the last year's cyber attacks. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*The socialist Government of Edi Rama is stable and powerful, controlling state politics. Next political challenge is scheduled for May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023 when local elections will be held. Electoral preparations are due to start and political parties have already started exploratory talks. Main opposition party - PD – still remains divided and state's courts will decide for its future. The*

*country has started the process of accession negotiations with the EU and 2023 looks as a great and optimistic opportunity. Tirana should accelerate structural reforms, seeking to speed up the accession process. Albania should focus on fighting corruption and organized crime, establishing rule of law and public transparency, eliminating state officials' immunity, modernizing public administration and stabilizing political life in order to strengthen its position towards the EU membership.*



## BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

January 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Russian Ambassador to Serbia and former Ambassador to BiH, Aleksandar Bocan-Harchenko expressed the view that a solid Bosnia cannot exist due to repeated requests to take away the jurisdiction of the Republika Srpska (RS) and abandon the Dayton Peace Agreement. Apart from that, Bocan-Harchenko expressed his concerns for Bosnia's candidate status for the EU's membership claiming that "*candidate status is a very serious and dangerous matter, and it includes the suspension of relations and cooperation between the RS and the Russian Federation.*" (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, two parties [Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu) and the People's European Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Narodni Evropski Savez Bosne i Hercegovine – NES)] from the federation of BiH withdrew from the ten party coalition on state level, protesting on the new law on state property adopted by the Republika Srpska's Parliament. However, the coalition still maintains its parliamentary majority with 23 seats in the 42 seats House of Representatives. Talks between the coalition partners on the formation of the new

Government are still in progress. (www.balkaninsight.com, www.sarajevotimes.com)

- January 8<sup>th</sup>, Bosnian Foreign Minister, Bisera Turkovic has reacted in her Serbian counterpart, Ivica Dacic's decision to attend the marking of the unconstitutional day of Republika Srpska, in Isocno, Sarajevo on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, accompanied by a large delegation. According to Turkovic such an action "harms the relations between BiH and the Republic of Serbia." (www.sarajevotimes.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Instability and uncertainty reign in BiH. Three months after the general elections in the country the new state Government (the Council of Ministers) has not formed yet. Although there is a ten parties coalition agreement, talks are still ongoing while two parties withdrew from talks. As usual, the state politics are hostage of the ethnic interests and pursuits of the entities. Republika Srpska (RS) remains keen on its secessionist policy undermining implementation of Dayton Accords. Hatred rhetoric from all sides escalates tension further between the three entities. Celebration of RS's national day on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023 is considered as a provocation by Muslim Bosnians (Bosniaks). Dayton peace agreement appears outdated, maintaining a non-functional state. Under these circumstances, there is fertile soil for ethnic disputes which could escalate tension into a conflict. The country got the candidate status for the EU's membership, but Russia warns that this could be dangerous and harmful. There is no doubt that decision of the EU was based only in political criteria seeking to secure Bosnia in the Euro-Atlantic structures.*

*Moreover, it aims to reduce Russian influence in the country. However, Russian influence remains high in Republika Srpska. The entity's President, Milorad Dodik honored last week the Russian President, Vladimir Putin with the Order of Republika Srpska. Political instability, poor economic performances and non-functional state institutions contribute in absence of rule of law, shortages in respect of human rights, weak public administration, democratic deficit, high levels of corruption and social distress. Currently Bosnia has a great chance to promote structural reforms under the EU candidate status.*



**BULGARIA:** January 2<sup>nd</sup>, Bulgarian Army is seeking to reinforce its manning by 565 people. More specific, the Ground Forces need 255 people, the Logistics Support Command looks for 280 people and the Joint Special Operations Command will hire 30 people. According to the Ministry of Defense's reports the Army suffers from low manning which affects its operational readiness. (www.novinite.com)

- January 3<sup>rd</sup>, Bulgaria has signed a long-term deal with neighbor Turkey that will give it access to liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals and the gas supply grid in the country as Sofia aims to diversify its energy supplies once provided by Russia. (www.aljazeera.com)

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, the Bulgarian acting Interior Minister, Ivan Demerdzhiev announced that the Prosecutor's office and Police are prepared to launch a special operation next week to combat illegal migration. Bulgaria and Turkey are collaborating by exchanging intelligence on illegal migration and there is a plan both countries

to launch Police operations simultaneously along their borders. (www.novinite.com)

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, Bulgaria's "We Continue the Change" (Prodalzhavame Promyanata - PP) party will return unfulfilled the mandate received on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 to the Bulgarian President, Rumen Radev. In accordance with the Constitution, Radev must hand the third mandate to a parliamentary group of his choice. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*Bulgarian long political crisis is continued. After four consecutive elections in the last 18 months the country has not yet formed a stable Government. It seems that the second largest party – PP - which has received the second mandate from the Bulgarian President, Rumen Radev, will not achieve to form a minority Government and it will return the mandate next week. Radev will hand over the third and final mandate to a party of his choice – in accordance with the Constitution – but it is assessed that there are little chances for a successful result. Consequently the country is moving towards new elections; more likely during the coming spring. Although the caretaker Government is working to fill in the governmental gap, long political instability and uncertainty affects the country and the future challenges it has to face. First of all, political crisis may delay Bulgaria's plan to enter the Eurozone by 2024. Moreover, long political instability postpones the much needed reforms on fighting corruption on top level state's officials. Apart from that, there is a high risk of inefficient use of the EU recovery funds. Finally, the country is without a viable budget for 2023 amid high inflation and potential economic slowdown.*

*Military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force.*



**CROATIA:** January 2<sup>nd</sup>, as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 Croatia has entered the Schengen Border Area and the Eurozone. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, the Croatian Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic said that his Government does not raise tensions with other countries and implements "a policy of dialogue defusing tensions and resolving outstanding issues." He reiterated that relations of Croatia and Serbia are burdened by the recent past, but his Government seeks to normalize mutual relations. (www.hr.n1info.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*2023 has started with the best conditions for Croatia. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 the country has entered the Schengen area and the Eurozone, achieving two strategic goals which make it stronger and more stable. Croats enjoy free movement in a borderless EU area of 420 million European people. Regarding the Eurozone membership, Croatia is still in the transition process from Kuna to Euro and the adaptation of market economy in the new reality. Euro-transition is marked by signs of profiteering, while the Government declares that will not accept such phenomenon. Entering the Eurozone and the Schengen area, Croatia which enjoys political stability creates favorable conditions for economic growth and a more attractive environment for investments. Lately, there are signs of a mutual approach between Belgrade and Zagreb to improve bilateral relations. Croatian Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic said that there*

*is room for amelioration of relations with Serbia, but he transferred the burden of responsibility to the other side claiming that Zagreb does not raise tensions with other countries. The “Christmas diplomacy” - the Serbian Foreign Minister, Ivica Dacic attended the Serb National Council Orthodox Christmas reception in Zagreb together with the Croat Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic – shows that there is a climate of approach but there are several difficult open issues between the two sides.*

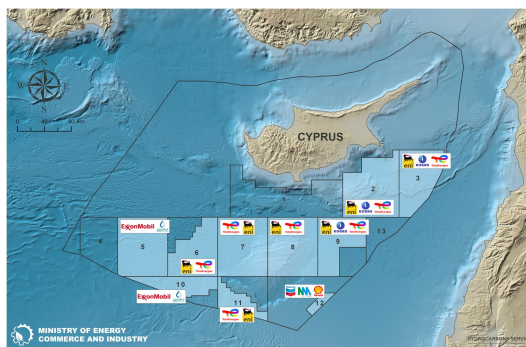


**CYPRUS:** January 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Chief of National Guard Lieutenant General, Demokritos Zervakis released that the National Guard has signed the first bilateral defense cooperation program with the US on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The program includes joint training of the Armed Forces, the sharing of military expertise and joint exercises held in Cyprus, the US or in any third country where the US have an established military presence. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, according to the so-called “transport minister” of the north occupied part of Cyprus, Erhan Arikli three countries, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia are ready to start direct flights to the north. Arikli revealed that direct flights from Russia will start on March 2023. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, the UN Secretary General’s mission of Good Offices report on Cypriot question presented a bleak outlook for the problem’s resolution. However, the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres has called on all Cypriots to actively engage in shaping the future of the island. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 7<sup>th</sup>, according to the Cypriot Energy Minister, Natasa Pillides the TOTAL – ENI consortium seeks to accelerate exploitation process of block six in the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone. (www.cyprus-mail.com)



Offshore Exploration and Exploitation Licenses

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

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

*Cypriot political forces are preparing for the coming presidential elections scheduled for February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Fourteen candidates join the race so far. Energy security is among the top priorities of the Cyprus republic, but the island has not produced any gas so far. Although the Government has allocated the exploration blocks in its Exclusive Economic Zone to several energy giants, the exploitation activity has been limited only in drillings and encouraging findings. Currently, the TOTAL – ENI energy consortium is trying to accelerate the exploitation process in block 6. It is vital for Cypriot interests to achieve eventually exploitation of natural gas and its transfer to international energy market. Strategic cooperation with Israel and Egypt is of great importance because Cyprus needs partners in its energy project. 2023 emerges as a crucial year for the future of the north occupied part of the island and the Turkish Cypriot community which lives there; there are signs that some countries*



*such as Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia plan to recognize indirectly the occupied territories by developing commercial relations with the local community (direct flights). Such a development could further deteriorate prospects of dialogue between the two parts for a viable resolution of the Cypriot question. Not only that, but the Turkish Cypriot administration claims that 2023 will be the year that the fenced off city of Varosha will fully open in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. In short, conditions are not encouraging and optimistic for any positive step or productive initiative in 2023. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps size). 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 5<sup>th</sup>, the British Museum announced that it was involved in constructive discussions with the Greek Government over the future of the Parthenon marbles. According to an article of the London Times, the two parts are close in a compromise that will allow the Parthenon sculptures to return in Athens in an open-ended loan and in return the Acropolis museum would lend for short periods Greek archaeological treasures to be exhibited in London. (www.theguardian.com, www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, a Turkish patrol boat harassed a boat of the Greek Coast Guard in the eastern Aegean Sea, southeast of the island of Farmakonisi, within the Greek territorial waters. The Turkish boat engaged in dangerous maneuvers against the Greek one, while the crew of the Greek vessel

fired warning shots in a safe area, forcing the Turkish boat to leave for the Turkish coast. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, according to Government sources the national elections will take place anytime from April onwards. (www.ekathimerini.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

*2023 is a year of parliamentary elections for the country. The date of the elections is not yet known and the Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis is remaining committed in his decision that the elections will be held in the end of the four year term of the current Government. According to governmental sources the elections will be held from April and onwards. Political parties are on electoral alert and actually the pre-electoral campaign has already started. Turkey keeps on provoking Greece not only verbally, but also with violation of the Greek airspace and territorial waters. Top Turkish officials stated last week that any extension of Greek territorial waters from six to twelve miles would provoke the forceful reaction of Ankara. However, the Greek Government appears restrained and avoids provocative statements remaining committed on international law. There is always the risk of an accident which could lead to escalation between the two sides. Greece has established a comprehensive friendly lobby in the US decision-making center which promotes the Greek interests successfully so far. In this context, the country enjoys an upgraded relationship with Washington which is interpreted as significant military assistance.*

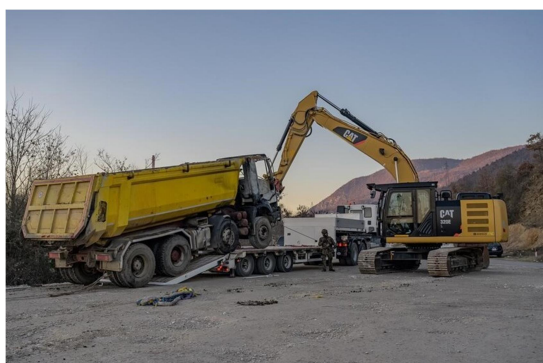




## **KOSOVO:** January 2<sup>nd</sup>, Kosovo

Prime Minister Albin Kurti has called for the reinforcement of KFOR in order peace to be maintained in the region. ([www.n1info.com](http://www.n1info.com))

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, the NATO-led KFOR mission announced that it has completed the removal of several vehicles blocking roads in northern Kosovo, through the deployment of engineer units to the areas of Duda's Rock and Srbovac arterial route. ([www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int))



KFOR removes vehicles blocking roads in northern Kosovo

(Photo source: [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int))

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti said that Belgrade is the problem for mutual recognition and normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Therefor he asked from the EU and US to put more pressure on Belgrade for tangible results in their dialogue. ([www.beta.rs](http://www.beta.rs))

- January 8<sup>th</sup>, Kosovo Serbs protested in Strpce over the armed attack of a local ethnic Albanian against two young Serbs who wounded. Protesters demanded safety for their children. Leader of the Serb List (Srpska Lista) party, Goran Rakic joined the protest. ([www.tanjug.rs](http://www.tanjug.rs))

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** :

*Situation in Kosovo has de-escalated with the discreet intervention of KFOR which undertook the responsibility of removing the vehicles from the blocked roads in the north. The EU and the US are exercising pressure to both sides to sit back on the table of talks and to reach an agreement for mutual recognition and normalization of their relations. Both sides appear as hardliners but it is assessed that there are ongoing secret talks for a final agreement. There is always the risk of a provocative action which could escalate tension between the two parts. Kosovo needs urgently institutional reforms especially in the fields of economy, rule of law, public administration, justice and democratic rule. Organized crime, corruption, money laundering, weak public administration, absence of rule of law, controlled justice, transactions between politicians and criminals are persistent "open sores" for Kosovo. However, normalization of relations with Serbia and recognition of Kosovo as an independent state is critical for its future and this would not happen without compromise and cost.*



## **MOLDOVA:** January 2<sup>nd</sup>, Moldovan

President, Maia Sandu claimed that she wishes Moldova to become an EU member by 2030. She recognized that it is a very ambitious goal but she has "high expectations." ([www.moldovalive.md](http://www.moldovalive.md))

## **COUNTRY ASSESSMENT** :

*Moldova - together with Romania - is considered as the forward bastion of the west regarding the Ukrainian front. Thus the pro-western Government of the country enjoys political and*

*economic support by the EU and the US. Brussels fully support the European prospect of Moldova. The Moldovan Government should accelerate economic, administrative and judicial reforms in order to fight corruption, establish rule of law, develop transparent and accountable public administration, and strengthen democratic rule. Social policy should be top priority for the ruling majority since Moldovan society is suffering from poverty and lack of social care. However, Russian influence does exist in the country. Moldova remains fully dependent on Russian gas, while Russian troops station in Transnistria. The clean pro-western orientation of Moldova could trigger hybrid or asymmetric attacks of Russia in Moldovan infrastructure. Transnistria could always become a factor of destabilization of Moldova. Moldovan territory is of vital strategic importance for Russia and NATO. It shares borders with Ukraine and the NATO member, Romania.*



**MONTENEGRO:** January 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Montenegrin Prime Minister, Dritan Abazovic in an interview for local daily Vijesti he claimed that he has developed a relationship with the Serb President, Aleksandar Vucic, but the latter does not govern Montenegro. Abazovic defended his relationship with Vucic saying that he has also a relationship with the Albanian, Kosovo and BiH leaders which is normal for the state's Prime Minister. (www.cdm.me)

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister-designate, Miodrag Lekic said that negotiations between the parliamentary majority forces have failed and there will not be formed a new Government. (www.cdm.me)

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, following the failed negotiations of the parliamentary majority on the establishment of a new Government, the main opposition party Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore - DPS) announced that the top priority should be the formation of the Constitutional Court and the call of snap elections. (www.cdm.me)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Montenegro has entered into a long political and institutional crisis which threatens the European perspective of the country. Parliamentary majority faces internal conflicts due to the parties' political interests and latest talks on the formation of a new Government have failed extending political instability and uncertainty. It should be underlined that Montenegro is in the middle of an international rivalry for political influence in the country. The west directly intervenes in the state's internal political affairs aiming to exercise pressure towards the parliamentary majority which is considered as a pro-Russian and pro-Serbian force threatening the "Balkan order." On the other hand, it is certain that Russia and Serbia have identified a "weak link" in southeast Europe, seeking to increase influence in a region considered under the western control. The EU threatens the country with isolation and blockade of the accession process if a new pro-Russian Government is formed. Call for snap parliamentary elections together with the presidential elections, scheduled on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023 is a likely option which could signal the exit of the country of the political deadlock. However, top priority of parliamentary majority remains restoration of the Constitutional*

*Court functionality as a major step for the end of current institutional crisis. Apart from political and institutional instability, the country faces strong challenges such as the need for concrete reforms in the field of justice, rule of law, fight against corruption, money laundering, and organized crime, public administration transparency and accountability.*



**NORTH MACEDONIA:** January 2<sup>nd</sup>, North Macedonia took over on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairmanship-in-Office for 2023. The country's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bujar Osmani is the new Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization. (www.mia.mk)

- January 4<sup>th</sup>, Foreign Minister and member of the ethnic Albanian party Democratic Union for Integration (Demokratska Unija za Integracija - DUI), Bujar Osmani confirmed that public debate will start regarding constitutional changes. Main opposition Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) is strongly opposed in the amendment of the Constitution. However, the Government appears committed to forward the changes and according to the governmental plan the constitutional amendments will be introduced by the end of February and the whole process will be concluded by the coming autumn. (www.mia.mk)

- January 7<sup>th</sup>, leader of the 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 that his party wants early parliamentary elections. He did not miss to foresee that the Parliament will be dissolved by the end of January or beginning of February at the latest, a caretaker Government will be formed and snap elections will be held in the second half of May. (www.mia.mk)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*North Macedonia has entered into political instability. The amendment of the Constitution – necessary for the opening of accession negotiations with the EU – could trigger political tension and uncertainty in the country. The weak parliamentary majority which enjoys support of 61 MPs in the 120 seats Assembly needs a two-thirds majority or 80 MPs to secure the constitutional changes; a prospect which looks like unlikely to be achieved. The main opposition VMRO-DPMNE has not rejected the constitutional amendments, but it counter-proposes the dissolution of the Parliament and snap elections first. It is assessed that VMRO-DPMNE is “negotiating” its stance aiming to get political gains. Besides, political pressure from Brussels is increasing towards a consensus on the constitutional change. Geopolitical situation is fragile in Southeast Europe due to the war in Ukraine and there is no time for delays in the Euro-Atlantic prospect of the Western Balkan countries. Constitutional amendment for the inclusion of the Bulgarian minority in the state's Constitution should be introduced by the Government by the beginning of 2023 if North*

*Macedonia wishes to complete the EU review by the coming November. On the contrary, VMRO-DPMNE proposes snap election in May; a scenario which will delay the progress of the accession process of the country towards the EU. It should be highlighted that the public opinion is strongly opposed on the Bulgarian minority inclusion in the state's Constitution. However, the external pressure in the country's political forces may exercise a catalytic role in North Macedonia's internal politics. Corruption, organized crime, weak justice and absence of rule of law continue to reign in North Macedonia.*



**ROMANIA:** January 5<sup>th</sup>, the US Army 101 Airborne Division is training in southeast Romania close to where Moscow is stockpiling weapons on the Crimean peninsula. The division's soldiers have also been deployed to the country's north, just a few miles from the Ukrainian border, to train alongside Romanian troops. The division was ordered to deploy some 4,000 soldiers and senior commanders just weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, according to The New York Times. ([www.romaniajournal.ro](http://www.romaniajournal.ro))

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, the US Pentagon announced that Romania will acquire an unspecified number of Naval Strike Missile Coastal Defense Systems to defend its Black Sea coastline. Raytheon and Norwegian Kongsberg will provide the systems by 2028 as part of the deal that could be worth up to \$217 million after all the options are exercised. According to a 2021 report from Norwegian engineering magazine Teknisk Ukeblad, the deal would pay for two coastal defense systems that would amount to four mobile launchers and two

command and control nodes for the batteries. ([www.romania-insider.com](http://www.romania-insider.com))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*2023 finds Romania still in the waiting list of the Schengen Zone; a strategic goal for the country which has not come true yet. Consequently, Bucharest will continue its efforts in 2023, but although there are some positive signs from the EU, it remains unlikely Romania to achieve its goal within the year. OECD is another strategic challenge of the country which is strongly connected with state's reforms in public administration, rule of law, tax administration and sustainability of public finances. Besides, economy remains the main challenge for the country. Economic recession is likely in 2023 and Romania should focus on absorbing the EU funds and reducing gradually the fiscal deficit. The coalition Government remains stable so far, but the agreement between SDP and NLP for the switching of the Prime Minister on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (NLP will hand over the Prime Minister's office to SDP) could bring political instability if NLP refuses to keep the agreement, toppling the Government. Romania is in the forward bastion of NATO in the eastern flank with upgraded role due to the war in Ukraine. NATO troops and weapons are stationing in Romania. Strengthening of Romanian Armed Forces with sophisticated weapons (fighter jets, ground to air and sea defense missile systems etc) is a priority not only for Romania itself but also for NATO.*



**SERBIA:** January 2<sup>nd</sup>, the US Ambassador in Serbia, Christopher Hill said that American companies will invest more in Serbia in 2023. ([www.rs.n1info.com](http://www.rs.n1info.com))



The US Ambassador in Serbia, Christopher Hill  
(Photo source: [www.rs.usembassy.gov](http://www.rs.usembassy.gov))

- January 5<sup>th</sup>, leader of the opposition Party of Freedom and Justice (Stranka Slobode i Pravde - SSP) said that he expects elections by the end of 2023. ([www.rs.n1info.com](http://www.rs.n1info.com))

- January 8<sup>th</sup>, the office of the Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic announced that KFOR peacekeeping mission in Kosovo rejected the Serbian request for the deployment of up to 1,000 Army and Police personnel in accordance with the 1244 UNSC resolution. ([www.rs.n1info.com](http://www.rs.n1info.com))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Kosovo issue is the main challenge for Serbia and potential developments could trigger chained reactions in state's politics. The US and EU put much pressure on Belgrade to force it to return on the table of talks with Prishtina and to reach a compromise. It is assessed that the President, Aleksandar Vucic is not negative in a compromised agreement of mutual recognition. He could sacrifice Kosovo for a rapid accession to the EU. The US Ambassador, Cristopher Hill*

*did not hesitate to call the American businessmen to invest in the country because as he said "what happens in Serbia is an inspiration" for investors!!! This could be considered as a direct support of Vucic and should be taken seriously into consideration for the near future developments. On the other hand, Serbia maintains a special relation with Russia and this is considered as a threat for the US and EU interests in Southeastern Europe. Opposition is asking for snap elections within 2023 and Kosovo issue may be a good reason for that. But it is not certain if Washington and Brussels have spare time for delays. Corruption, organized crime, public administration accountability, media freedom are the main internal challenges for the country. 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 and China.*



**SLOVENIA:** January 7<sup>th</sup>, according to the Prime Minister, Robert Golob, 2023 will be a year of reforms. The ruling coalition will outline in mid-January the reforms' project and more specifically reforms on health, education and pension, wage, and tax systems. ([www.dnevnik.si](http://www.dnevnik.si))

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*The center-left Government of Robert Golob enjoys public trust and appears ready to implement an ambitious project of social, health and education reforms in 2023. It is essential for the ruling coalition to fulfil its pre-electoral promises for the improvement of social security,*



*health services, labor conditions and distribution of economic means in order to maintain its public trust. Although there are some signs of internal conflicts in the ruling coalition, it is assessed that the Government is stable. European energy crisis and high rates of inflation exercise pressure on social stability and state's economic performances. Health sector and law enforcement services (Police) are the near future challenges for the Government where the ruling coalition's efficiency will be tested.*



**TURKEY:** January 6<sup>th</sup>, united opposition consisted of six parties - Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) – CHP, Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi) – SP, Good Party (İyi Parti) – IP, Future Party (Gelecek Partisi) - GP, Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti) – DP, Democracy and Progress Party (Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi) – DEVA – met in Ankara for talks but it was announced that they have not started yet talks for their presidential candidate in the coming elections. After meeting it was said that meetings will be held more frequent and the two main priorities of the coalition are the selection of the joint candidate for President and the achievement of the necessary majority in the Parliament for the constitutional reform. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, Turkish Vice President, Fuat Oktay commenting the visit of the Chief of the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (NDGS), General Konstantinos Floros on the island of Pserimos in the eastern Aegean which Türkiye claims as demilitarized, said that “Ankara would do whatever is necessary.” (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 8<sup>th</sup>, Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu has inaugurated a visit in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe seeking to strengthen ties with African countries. Cavusoglu visits are held in the context of Türkiye's Africa Partnership Policy. (www.dailysabah.com)

- January 8<sup>th</sup>, Swedish Prime Minister, Ulf Kristersson said that his country has fulfilled what Türkiye has asked for, but he highlighted that Ankara asks for some concessions that Sweden cannot make. However, Kristersson expressed his confidence that Türkiye will approve Sweden's application to join NATO. (www.dailysabah.com)

## COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

*Türkiye has entered into the pre-electoral period of the coming presidential elections. Main opposition parties have form a united coalition seeking to topple incumbent President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan from his long reign. However, it looks like a difficult task and the choosing of the right candidate against Erdogan would be a key decision for the opposition. It is assessed that Erdogan maintains his political power based on poor and religious population of the country. Economy remains as the main vulnerability of Türkiye. Extremely high inflation and weakness of Turkish Lira increase population's poverty and social instability. Erdogan and his top officials maintain a provocative rhetoric against Greece with the threat of violence and military action being of the forefront. Although Türkiye promotes an independent foreign policy as a regional power, it faces several problems with the EU member states and the US. The Turkish – American relations are in low point and improvement cannot be seen soon. Deteriorated*

*relations with the US affect the Turkish armament projects since Turkiye has been excluded from the F-35 fighter jet and Washington refuses so far to sell modern F-16s “Viper” to the Turkish Air Force. In short, Turkiye is behaving as a regional power, exercising a multilateral foreign policy. The main characteristics of this policy could be considered skillful adaptation and flexibility. In the Ukrainian front, Turkey has achieved to become a privileged interlocutor of both sides, upgrading its role into a useful mediator. Apart from that, the need for the European energy diversification from Russia, has upgraded the Turkish role as a potential energy hub. In short, the Russian invasion in Ukraine could bring fundamental changes in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. In this context, Turkey seeks to restore relations with Egypt, Israel, UAE and Saudi Arabia. Needless to say that PKK and Kurdish resistance is a serious threat against the Turkish national security long time ago and its elimination is of critical importance for Ankara. Turkish authorities continue to violate human rights, media freedom and democratic rule. Arrests of political opponents and elected MPs, journalists who criticize the ruling AKP and political activists is a common practice. Turkey could not be considered as a democracy but rather as a “hybrid democracy” since the President adopts authoritarian practices. Attacks against media and civil society might be increased due to pre-electoral period.*


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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. 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.