

MARCH 1 - 7, 2021 – VOL. 4 - ISSUE 9



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

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

AT A GLANCE



SOUTHEAST EUROPE DIRECTORATE

PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE TO THOSE WHO SHAPE THE FUTURE

“SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AT A GLANCE” (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: March 1st, information on Turkish citizens living in Albania was collated and sent to Ankara to be used in Court cases, according to documents published by the Nordic Monitor, a group of journalists and ex-security specialists. (www.exit.al)

- March 1st, Albania's two main opposition parties, the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) and the Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI) signed a pre-electoral coalition deal on Monday. (www.exit.al)

- March 2nd, Albania and the EU held their 11th meeting of the Stabilization and Association Council on Monday. Through a message on social media, the President of the European Parliament David Sassoli said that “the European Parliament support for the timely start of the first intergovernmental conference.” (www.exit.al)

- March 3rd, according to a new report of the US State Department, Albania is a source country of cannabis and a home base for organized crime groups moving narcotics from source countries into European markets. Albanian nationals are heavily involved in trafficking illicit narcotics throughout Europe but the Government needs to do more. (www.exit.al)

- March 5th, Turkey and Albania have agreed to insert respective languages in school curricula in both countries, according to need. (www.exit.al)

- March 5th, the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) has supported the start of EU accession talks with Albania as soon as the country meets the

conditions set by the European Council. (www.exit.al)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Various reports on Albania are not encouraging for the near future of the country. According to the US Department of State Albania is considered as a major drug trafficking and money laundering hub in Europe, while the European Parliament released a report claiming that the first intergovernmental conference between Brussels and Tirana will take place after the latter will fulfill the 15 conditions that were set by the EU. It is assessed that the EU has decided to hold the conference after the parliamentary elections in Albania in a new political reality and climate in the country. The EU approach for Albania's European future could be summarized as “first elections, then talks.” Brussels insist on the 15 conditions but accession talks will start if Albania achieves to restore political stability and order in the country and to reach tangible results in the fight against corruption, organized crime and money laundering, in the establishment of rule of law, and in conducting free and fair elections on April 25th, 2021. Albania suffers by a longtime institutional and constitutional crisis, while the Parliament is not functional. In other words Albania has a significant democratic deficit. Albania and Turkey comes closer and closer and the latter enjoys advanced privileges in Tirana. Tirana is cooperating with discipline in Turkish demands for persecutions against Turkish citizens living in Albania. Moreover, Ankara is funding huge investment projects building hospitals and houses. “Soft power” is also on the forefront of their bilateral relations; for instance the beginning of teaching Turkish language in

Albanian schools and the opposite. The case of the Italian “Ndrangheta” mafia group could political “earthquake” in Albania.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

March 3rd, the newly appointed Russian Ambassador in Bosnia, Igor Kalabukhov, proposed Bosnia to be included in the Group of Strategic Vision “Russia – Islamic World” which aims to strengthen cooperation between Russia and countries where Muslims live, during a meeting with BiH’s House of Peoples Chairman, Bakir Izetbegovic, on Wednesday. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- March 5th, Chairman and Serb member of Bosnian tripartite Presidency Milorad Dodik and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov agreed that the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina should close down instead of having a new international envoy appointed in that institution, said a statement issued by the Chairman’s Cabinet on Friday. (www.ba.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bosnian Serb leadership’s proposal for closure of the High Representative Office in Bosnia got support by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov. In sum, Russia multiplies its efforts to increase influence in Bosnia using the Serb Bosnian entity as a “vehicle.” Proposal of the Russian Ambassador in Sarajevo to Bosnian authorities to join the “Russia – Islamic World” group is considered as another effort of Moscow to integrate Bosnia in Russian structures of influence. On the other hand, Serbia is taking advantage of the so-called “vaccine diplomacy”

by donating vaccines to Sarajevo. Increased influence of Belgrade is noted after political change in Montenegro which facilitates Serbia to exercise its policy in neighboring countries. In this context, acceleration of procedures by Bosnia to strengthen its relationship with NATO could be considered as a countermeasure due to increased influence of Russia and Serbia in the region.



BULGARIA: March 3rd, the

Parliamentary Defense Committee approved at second reading the amendments to the Defense and the Armed Forces Act. One of the changes envisages the creation of cyber-command and logistics support, BNR reports. (www.novinite.com)

- March 5th, a joint statement by the US Senators from the Foreign Policy Committee in connection with the launch of the election campaign in Bulgaria, claims that persistent corruption, restricted media freedom, the politicization of the judiciary, as well as other threats to the rule of law pose serious challenges to bilateral relations between the US and Bulgaria. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Pre-electoral campaign has started officially in Bulgaria for the parliamentary elections of April 4th, 2021. The US Senators Foreign Policy Committee’s statement speaking for corruption, media freedom and independence justice in Bulgaria could be considered as an interference to the country’s internal affairs and more specific amid the pre-electoral campaign. However, the Senators concerns are not far from reality and the new ruling party or coalition should focus its

policy in fighting corruption, improve media freedom and guarantee independence justice. Besides, Bulgaria suffered last year by citizens' protests demanding public affairs transparency and justice reforms. 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 working on complying with NATO standards (although they are far from them) and in this context they announced the establishment of Cyber Command and Logistics Support.



CROATIA: March 4th, Croatia's public debt totaled 327.8 billion kuna (43.3 billion Euros) in November 2020, or up by 12.1% since December 2019, data released by the Central Bank showed. Over the same period, the country's public debt-to-GDP ratio increased by 15.3% to 88.6%. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- March 5th, the state statistics bureau DZS formally lodged a proposal to amend the law on census, which would move this year's once-in-a-decade population census from April to September. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- March 6th, a conference on Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) in the 2021 population census was held on Saturday where a joint plan of action by the Bosniak community throughout Croatia and the need to draft an action plan for and inform the community of the importance of ethnic identification was discussed. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT  :

Croatia enjoys political stability. The Central Bank of Croatia has released worrying data for the country's public debt and this could be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the earthquakes that hit the country. Current situation has also forced the Croatian statistic service to postpone the national census from April to September. Illegal migration in borders with Bosnia remains a major problem for the country, despite the significant reduce of migrants last two months. With the weather getting better and warmer it is expected an increase on the migrant flows which seek to enter the EU zone through Croatia. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: March 2nd, President Nicos Anastasiades told the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres he is ready and determined to engage with true political will in talks during an informal meeting on the Cyprus problem in Geneva from April 27th to 29th, 2021. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- March 2nd, Britain's Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has described the internationally accepted model of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation as "a starting point" for a settlement to the Cyprus issue, urging "flexibility and pragmatism." (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- March 3rd, an island-wide referendum on local government reform will be held on the same day as the May 30th, 2021 parliamentary elections, the Council of Ministers decided on Wednesday. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- March 3rd, the Government of Cyprus has refuted a report by Greek daily “To Vima” which set out a scenario of the EastMed natural gas pipeline circumventing the Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus is getting ready for the 5+1 informal meeting for the Cypriot question scheduled on April 27th – 29th, 2021. Expectations are very low since the two sides go to the meeting with substantial disagreements which make the establishment of a negotiation framework to look like a utopia. First of all, the Cypriot side advocates the solution of a bicomunal – bizonal federation with decentralized competencies for the federal parts. On the other hand, Turkish Cypriot community supports the idea of two independent and sovereign states. The British proposal for resolving the Cypriot question appears softer and could become as a bridge between the two sides. The UK proposes the federal model with weaker powers of the central Government which could bend the Turkish Cypriot claims for two states and secure their rights. In the same time, Cyprus strengthens regional cooperation with Eastern Mediterranean countries, seeking not only to achieve external balance against the Turkish aggression, but also to develop efficient cooperation in the energy sector. However, the energy cooperation between Greece, Cyprus with Egypt and Israel has started to be questioned. Despite information for problems in the EastMed project, the approach between Egypt and Turkey with the initiative of the latter for restoration of bilateral relations and delimitation of sea zones could undermine the close relationship between Nicosia and Cairo. A

potential overthrow of the Cyprus – Egypt cooperation could undermine the whole security and energy policy of Nicosia. Turkey maintains a significant military force on the island (Army Corps seize). 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: March 2nd, Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) MP Thodoris Dritsas provoked a backlash on Tuesday after stating that the deadly “November 17th” terror group, of which jailed terrorist Dimitris Koufodinas was a leading member, had not intimidated anyone. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- March 2nd, hundreds of people marched through central Athens on Tuesday evening to express their solidarity with a convicted terrorist whose health is failing after being on hunger strike for 54 days. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- March 2nd, the Government Council for Foreign Affairs and Defense announced the new composition of Greece’s military leadership. The announcement followed the annual review of the senior military officers (Army Generals, Admirals, and Air Force Generals) on Monday. Despite some changes, it is notable that the four Chiefs of Staff remain unchanged. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- March 4th, the US is ready to discuss the sale of American frigates and F-35 fighter jets whenever Greece is ready, the US Ambassador to the country, Geoffrey Pyatt, told journalists on

Thursday in a discussion that included Athens' plans to upgrade the Navy and Air Force capabilities. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- March 5th, Greece will introduce an increase in military service for conscripts serving in the Army from 9 to 12 months, starting in May, as part of a program to boost the Armed Forces amid tension with regional rival Turkey. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- March 6th, with Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias scheduled to visit Cairo on Monday, Greece is reportedly analyzing recent statements by his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu about a supposed invitation to Egypt for the delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) between the two countries. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Greece is watching closely the activity of the Turkish hydrographic vessel "CESME" in the waters of the Aegean Sea. Turkish action is considered as a low risk one and it is attributed to the neighboring country's effort to maintain its presence in the Aegean but with low tension actions. Greek Armed Forces are on high readiness for reaction in case of a provocative activity which disputes the Greek sovereign rights in the region. In this context and taking into consideration the high military tension last summer between Greece and Turkey, the Greek Government implements an ambitious project for strengthening the Armed Forces. First of all it seeks to resolve the problem of the low manning of the Army by increasing the military service for conscripts from 9 to 12 months aiming to increase the manpower of the military units. Secondly, it seeks to strengthen the Navy and Air Force power

by purchasing new frigates and fighter jets. The Greek – US defense cooperation is upgrading and actually Greece offers its entire military and non-military infrastructure at the US disposal for military use. The Stefanovikeo, Volos Army Aviation base, the Souda, Crete naval base, the Larisa airbase, and the port of Alexandroupolis are only a few of the infrastructure could be used by the US forces for transit or deployment. The Greek authorities are seeking Not only to gain access in modern American military equipment and weapons but also to upgrade the state's role in the Balkans and in the wider region. On the other side, the US is seeking to secure the access of its military forces for deployment in Europe amid increase of the US – Russia confrontation and the downgrade of the Turkish – American relations. In other words, it could be said that the US does not trust Turkey as a reliable partner which will facilitate the American forces for deployment and engagement in a potential front in the European or Middle East. Leftish terrorism is considered as a major threat in Greek security since there are several active cells (which are linked with one way or another) which could attack in state's officials or infrastructure. Supporters of the jailed (11 times in life prison plus 25 years) terrorist Dimitris Koufodinas protested in Athens' streets last week constituting a paradox for Greek society which is appeared of having a group of people who support terrorism. More paradox is that an MP of the main opposition party SYRIZA claimed publically that the terrorist group "November 17th" has not terrorized anyone with its action (the official party rejected the MP's statement). Greece is watching closely the Turkish attempt to approach Egypt for delimitation of their maritime zones in the Mediterranean Sea putting a threat to the

Greek – Egyptian relations and their bilateral agreements.



KOSOVO: March 1st, Albin Kurti, Kosovo's former Prime Minister and the winner at the latest elections with his Self-Determination (Lëvizja Vetëvendosje – LVV) movement, reiterated on Monday his view about dialogue with Belgrade being not a main priority of the next Government he might head again. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 2nd, the EU envoy Miroslav Lajcak after a meeting with the acting President Vjosa Osmani in Pristina said that the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue will be continued once the new Kosovo Government takes office. Osmani told the media that she told Lajcak that part of the process should be reviewed as part of preparations to continue the talks. She said the dialogue should result in mutual recognition within the current borders of Kosovo. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 2nd, Matthew Palmer, the US envoy for the Western Balkans, reiterated on Tuesday that the US administration's aim for the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue on the normalization of relations was ended in an agreement on mutual recognition, adding that Washington strongly supported the process. (www.n1.info.com)

- March 4th, eighteen days after Kosovo's parliamentary elections on February 14th, 2021 final results have been announced by the Central Election Commission with Self-Determination (Lëvizja Vetëvendosje – LVV) extending its lead in first place. LVV recorded a final result of 49.95% (58 seats in the 120 seats Parliament), the largest vote share in Kosovo electoral history.

Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Demokratike e Kosovës - PDK) are confirmed in second place with 16.9% (19 seats), while Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) came in third having recorded 12.64% (15 seats) of the vote. Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës - AAK) got 7.07% (8 seats). The Belgrade-backed Serbian List (Srpska Lista) have again won all 10 seats reserved for Kosovo Serbs in the Assembly after receiving just over 45,000 votes. (www.prishtinainsight.com)

- March 4th, Albin Kurti, the leader of Kosovo's Self-Determination (Lëvizja Vetëvendosje – LVV) and most likely next Prime Minister, said on Thursday he could not make the dialogue with Belgrade his cabinet's priority, adding that as long as the Serb List (Srpska Lista) had ten MPs, the Constitution could not be changed to enable the unification with Albania. (www.n1.info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

LVV and its leader, Albin Kurti achieved a historic record on the February 14th, 2021 snap elections by getting 49.95% and 58 seats on the 120 seats Parliament. Kurti enjoys full freedom of initiative and action since he needs only 3 more MPs to form the new Government. It could be said with certainty that Kurti is the next Prime Minister of Kosovo and he has already started to make his intentions clear. According to him justice reform, fight of unemployment and management of the COVID-19 pandemic are his main priorities. Belgrade – Prishtina dialogue is not his priority and it is not a coincidence that the EU Envoy on Kosovo talks, Miroslav Lajcak immediately met Kurti to inform him about the talks' process. However, messages of the new

political power in Kosovo are not encouraging for a successful approach between the two parts in the near future. What is more worrying, is Kurti's persistence for Kosovo unification with Albania; a scenario which could destabilize the whole region. However, the stance of Albania in such a scenario is not clear yet, while the view of the EU and US currently appears negative. 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.



MOLDOVA: March 1st, the President of the Party of Socialists Igor Dodon said the party is ready to start dialogue with the parliamentary parties and President Maia Sandu. The Socialists ask Sandu to sign the decree to nominate the candidate for premiership who was proposed by the parliamentary majority until March 9th, 2021. Otherwise, they will resort to determined actions to stop the political chaos, IPN reports. (www.ipv.md)

- March 4th, the Constitutional Court (CC) partially accepted President Maia Sandu's request to declare some of the provisions of the Law on the Government unconstitutional. The Court declared unconstitutional the provisions that ban the Government whose mandate ended from naming or proposing persons for public posts others than of ministers, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- March 4th, President Maia Sandu announced that she had a new round of consultations on possible ways of overcoming the political crisis. She discussed optimal solutions that can help break the deadlock and trigger snap elections with

opinion leaders and constitutional law experts, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

- March 5th, the Head of the EU Delegation to Moldova Peter Michalko said that even if he was criticized for the opinion he stated earlier, the position of the European community remains unchanged. He noted it is worrisome that people involved in the bank fraud can take decisions about the investing of a new Government. The solving of the political crisis in Chisinau is the prerogative of the political class and the international community will only monitor the processes, IPN reports. (www.ipn.md)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Moldova has entered in a political deadlock which threatens peace and stability of the country. The newly elected President, Maia Sandu hostage of the Constitution and the Parliament's power cannot undertake political initiatives to consolidate its power. Her efforts to call for snap elections by dissolving the Parliament have overcome Constitutional order. Actually, Sandu has achieved in a very short time to become part of the political problem of the country instead of presenting a fresh, new political proposal which would guarantee stability of Moldova. On the other hand, old political system seeks to maintain current situation aiming to overturn current political superiority of pro-western Sandu. The EU clearly supports Sandu and its actions supporting her with public statements. After Constitutional Court's decisions which have blocked Sandu's unconstitutional efforts, the President has engaged in political game civil society avoiding persistently institutional dialogue with the Parliament. There are calls for protests and situation could easily turn into

turbulence and violence. There are people who “dream” a Moldovan “orange revolution”, while there are international circles who are willing to support it. While the country faces a political anarchy society suffers from the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recession and social insecurity. Moreover, Moldovans are fed up with corrupted political elite which is interested only in its privileges ignoring social needs and demands. Moldova is a field of rivalry between the west and Russia and this affects the country’s stability and growth. The “Transnistrian case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: March 4th, last year, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Montenegro saw an inflow of 663 million Euro in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). By far the most money was invested in Montenegro by NATO states (230 million Euros). Individually, the first place in terms of investments is convincingly held by Russia, which invested 99 million Euros in Montenegro in 12 months. It is followed by China with an investment of 71 million Euros, and Switzerland with a bit over 63 million Euros. (www.cdm.me)

- March 4th, President of Montenegro Milo Djukanovic stated that Serbia is working incredibly persistently to its detriment. He added that the spirit of hatred from the bottle towards Montenegro and everything Montenegrin has now been released, which is why relations between the two countries are at the lowest possible level today. (www.cdm.me)

- March 6th, the Government of Montenegro has passed the decision granting temporary exemption

from visas for citizens of the Russian Federation, who will be allowed to enter, cross the territory and stay in Montenegro from April 1st to October 31st, 2021 for up to 90 days for a period of 180 days from the first day of their entry with a valid travel document, without visa. The Government has also enabled a temporary visa-free entry for citizens of Kazakhstan and Armenia for the same period. (www.cdm.me)

- March 7th, Serbia is Montenegro’s most important ally; its Prime Minister Ana Brnabic would be welcomed in Podgorica as if she were its resident, as Montenegro has no closer country than Serbia, stated Montenegro’s Prime Minister, Zdravko Krivokapic, adding that he would not have recognized Kosovo if he had been the Prime Minister at the time. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Montenegrin Government is following a pro-Russian and Pro-Serbian policy although it looks like is trapped between its political desires and the pro-western orientation of the country as it has established so far. Montenegro is a member of NATO and a candidate for accession in the EU. However, these two organizations have started to show signs of mistrust towards the Montenegrin Government suspecting that the ruling coalition is promoting a secret agenda. Turbulence and political provocation against the Government motivated by foreign circles aiming to topple the ruling coalition could not be excluded. 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: March 1st, answering a reporter's question on Monday regarding the refusal of the "Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts" (MANU) to change its name, the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev stressed that the "Prespa Agreement" must be respected as a state's law. (www.republika.mk)

- March 2nd, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, Ekaterina Zaharieva, speaking for Bulgarians in North Macedonia told BNT that it is unacceptable that the right to self-determination is not recognized in that country in the 21st century. When asked about the Bulgarian citizens, she said that those 100,000 people in North Macedonia are often intimidated. (www.republika.mk)

- March 2nd, Zoran Zaev presented what he called "Action 21;" a strategy that he insists it will reduce the huge levels of corruption in North Macedonia that recently caused a political crisis after the Transparency International report ranked the country at its historic lowest place (111th in the world). (www.republika.mk)

- March 3rd, Zoran Zaev's envoy to Bulgaria Vlado Buckovski expects that the dispute between the two countries will be overcome by the end of the year. In a statement for DW, Buckovski said that Bulgaria is currently tied up in its general election, which makes resolving the issue difficult. (www.republika.mk)

- March 3rd, Defense Minister Radmila Sekerinska criticized Bulgarian President Rumen Radev for his announcement that he will use the security and

intelligence agencies to respond to the violation of human rights of Bulgarians in North Macedonia. (www.republika.mk)

- March 4th, in a rather surprise move Wednesday afternoon, the Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev asked for the Parliament's confidence in the Government, receiving 62 votes out of 120. (www.balkan.eu.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev in a surprise move asked from the Parliament a confidence vote for his Government aiming to eliminate opposition VMRO-DPMNE's leaks that the Government has lost control of parliamentary majority and it is a matter of time its collapse. Zaev confirming his political sharpness has gained full control of North Macedonia's politics by surprising the opposition which appeared unready for such a challenge. With the confidence vote Zaev achieved not only to stop VMRO-DPMNE leaks but also to challenge credibility and reliability of the opposition party which appeared of spreading inaccurate information. Moreover, Zaev gained three months of stability which is huge political time. Currently, the Government undertakes political initiatives for resolving state's issues. Approach with Bulgaria continues and state's officials appear optimistic for a successful outcome by the end of year. Apart from that, Zaev is pushing for the implementation of the Prespa Agreement with Greece aiming to respect the country's obligations and to maintain good neighboring relations. Moreover, the national census has started its pre-work and it seems that the project is in its final stage for launch on April. Finally, the Government announced the project "Action 21" for tackling

corruption in the country. Crisis with Bulgaria is continued blocking the North Macedonia's progress in the EU accession process.



ROMANIA: March 1st, Pan-European party “Vot Europa” announced the registration of “Vot Romania” as a political party after a favorable decision of the Bucharest Court of Appeal. “Vot Romania” is the 15th national political party in Europe associated with “Vot Europa” in a pan-European movement present in 29 countries. (www.romania-insider.com)

- March 3rd, Romania's Parliament passed on March 2nd the state budget law for 2021, with 234 votes against 170, G4media.ro reported. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Adoption of the 2021 state budget by the Romanian Parliament constitutes a major victory of the ruling coalition and a strong confirmation of the governmental cohesion. Romania suffers from corruption and shortage of rule of law while there is a strong need of reforming public administration and justice system. In other words, Romania should focus on these sectors in order to unblock its accession in Schengen area and the Eurozone. 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: March 1st, the European Parliament said on Monday that it officially launched the second phase of the inter-party dialogue with the Serbian Parliament in a video conference with Speaker Ivica Dacic. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 1st, Serbia's Special Anti-terrorist Unit (SAJ) and the US Special Forces, known as “Green Berets” started on Monday their sixth joint 30-day exercise in fighting terrorism, Interior Ministry said in a statement. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 3rd, Dragan Djilas, the leader of Serbia's opposition Party of Freedom and Justice (Stranka Slobode i Pravde - SSP), said late on Tuesday that the country's inter-party dialogue under the European Parliament (EP) auspices were the last chance to have free elections and end political crisis peacefully. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 3rd, eleven opposition parties and movements in Serbia said there were about to form a joint body to deal with preparations for controlling the forthcoming elections in 2022, the “1 in 5 million” group's statement said on Wednesday. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 3rd, Serbian Foreign Minister Nikola Selakovic told a session of the Bundestag on Wednesday that Belgrade expects its partners to act decisively to prevent the creation of a Greater Albania. (www.rs.n1info.com)

- March 5th, the President of the Croatian National Council (HNV) in Serbia, Jasna Vojnic, sent a request to Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic for the introduction of the Croatian language in official use in some municipalities and the entire territory of the northern province of Vojvodina. (www.rs.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The inter-party dialogue promoted and supported by the European Parliament is ready to enter the second phase which includes consultations for reaching an agreement between the ruling SNS and extra-parliamentary opposition. The Europeans goal is the coming presidential (and most probably snap parliamentary) elections to be held with participation of the opposition under free, fair and democratic conditions. Opposition SPP leader, Dragan Djilas announced that if dialogue fails then protests will start; an announcement which sounds like an ultimatum towards the Government implying turbulence. Election of Albin Kurti as the new Kosovo Prime Minister could facilitate Belgrade's plan towards its secessionist province. The Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic appeared keen on dialogue and claimed that he promotes a mutual accepted resolution. It is Kurti who does not actually believe in dialogue and normalization of relations between Belgrade and Prishtina. Moreover, Serbia is trying to present Kosovo and Albania as factors of destabilization in the region due to their plans for unification. Corruption, organized crime, public administration accountability, media freedom are the main internal challenges for the country. Taking into consideration the close relation of Serbia and Russia and the harsh struggle for influence between the west and

Moscow, social and political turbulence could not be excluded in the near future especially if "foreign actors" seek to destabilize Serbian political life. 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: March 2nd, a new line-up of the Strategic Council for Foreign Policy, led by Foreign Minister Anze Logar, met for its maiden session, discussing upgrading the country's foreign policy strategy, the Foreign Ministry said. After the first strategy was adopted in 1999, Parliament passed a declaration on Slovenia's foreign policy and the Government adopted an accompanying strategic document in mid-2015, which will now be "refreshed." Proposals are currently being drawn up at the Ministry to "refresh" individual parts of the strategy. (www.sta.si)

- March 4th, media freedom in Slovenia will be one of the items on the European Parliament's agenda as it meets for a plenary next week as the planned debate on Government attempts to silence media in Poland and Hungary has been expanded to include Slovenia. The debate will be held next Wednesday. (www.sta.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The minority Government of Janez Jansa has achieved to stabilize its position and it seems that the opposition has stopped the practice of filing motions of no confidence against the Government or its Ministers. However, the fragile parliamentary majority of the Government makes political situation in the country uncertain and

unstable. The EU has put in its microscope media freedom in Slovenia advocating the deployment of a monitoring group in the country to assess current situation. 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.



TURKEY: March 1st, Turkey's economy grew 5.9% in the fourth quarter and 1.8% in 2020 as a whole, emerging as one of only a few globally to avoid a contraction due to the coronavirus pandemic, annual data showed on Monday. (www.aljazeera.com)

- March 3rd, Turkey may negotiate a maritime demarcation agreement with Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean, depending on the condition of bilateral ties, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu stated on Wednesday. (www.dailysabah.com)

- March 3rd, relations between Turkey and France will remain fragile until Ankara takes concrete action, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Tuesday. (www.dailysabah.com)

- March 4th, Turkey's Parliament Speaker Mustafa Sentop said Wednesday that a lasting solution to the Cyprus issue is only possible with two states, considering the fact that there are two different societies on the island. (www.dailysabah.com)

- March 5th, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg warned Thursday that Europe's defense depends on close trans-Atlantic bonds and not on a quest for the continent's strategic autonomy, also underlining that the EU's flanks are defended in the southeast by Turkey, which sits on the borders with Syria and Iraq and is

"extremely important in the fight against Daesh and international terrorism."
(www.dailysabah.com)


- March 5th, Ankara rejected on Friday the "baseless" decisions against Turkey made in Wednesday's Arab League Foreign Ministers meeting. (www.dailysabah.com)


- March 7th, tensions between Ankara and Tehran have been running high lately with increasing diplomatic sparring coinciding with Iran-backed militias issuing statements threatening Turkey and boosting their presence ahead of a possible Turkish operation into Iraq's northern Sinjar region to eradicate the PKK's presence. (www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Latest regional developments have made foreign policy of Turkey more complicated with new challenges. In Libya, the new political situation which has put an end to the long civil war put at risk the Turkish interests, despite the interim Prime Minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah's statements that Libya will maintain its close relationship with Turkey. It is not certain if the new Government which will come from the elections will continue to support the Turkish military presence in Libya or it will respect the Turkish – Libyan agreement on maritime zones. Relations between Turkey and Iran are deteriorating following the latter's strong reaction in Turkish Armed Forces presence in North Iraq for fighting the Kurds of PKK. Militant groups which are supported by Iran (Asaib Ahl al-Haq, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba) have directly threatened Turkish forces with attacks if they try to conduct operations in the

region Sinjar which is located in a strategic point for Turkey, Iraq and Iran. There are confusing information for an attempted approach between Egypt and Turkey following a long time of frozen relations due to Anakara's harsh criticism to the Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah El Sisi's regime. Turkey leaks that Egypt is willing to negotiate the maritime zones in Eastern Mediterranean overturning its agreement with Greece. It is notable that the Secretary-General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg highlighted last week that the EU needs Turkey for its security sending a message not only to Europe, but also to the US that Turkey is an integral part of the western security. 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.

 *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.*


www.hermesresearch.eu


email: info@hermesresearch.eu

Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karamelas

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.*