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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: January 5th, the Central Election Commission (CEC) decided to terminate the parliamentary mandates for MPs Aqif Rakipi and Gledion Rehovica, from the Party for Justice, Integration and Unity (Partia Drejtësi, Integrim dhe Unitet - PDIU) and Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI) respectively. The decision was made in implementation of the decriminalization law due to the fact that the two MPs did not report in their decriminalization statements that have been convicted in Italy for robbery using aliases. The U.S embassy in Tirana expressed its satisfaction for CEC's decision releasing a public statement *"The U.S. Embassy welcomes the decision today by the CEC to remove the mandates of Aqif Rakipi and Gledion Rehovica. This decision is positive evidence that the important process of decriminalization, begun in December 2015, is continuing in Albania."* (www.albaniannews.com, www.top-channel.tv, www.al.usembassy.gov)

- January 5th, the President Ilir Meta paid a visit in the city of Pustec where it is located the "Macedonian" minority in Albania. During his visit Meta was received by local authorities and members of the minority. The President said that the minority enriches the country stating *"We must work together so that the Municipality of Pustec can be one of the most prosperous, always in my attention."* Albania passed a law last October for the protection of national minorities in the country recognizing nine minorities; the Greek, Macedonian, Aromanian, Roma, Egyptian, Montenegrin, Bosnian, Serbian, and Bulgarian (law 96/2017; article 3; paragraph 2).

- January 7th, opposition leaders Lulzim Basha of the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) and Monika Kryemadhi of the Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim - LSI) agreed in organizing massive protests during January in Tirana. They did not set specific dates but agreed in bringing in Tirana their parties' supporters for the protests. Several meetings will be held in the coming days for coordinating the protests. (www.albaniannews.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political tension may rise due to strong opposition reactions against the Government's decisions and actions. Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.



BOSNIA &

HERZEGOVINA: January 4th, President of Republica Srpska (RS) Milorad Dodik has called the Mayors of the Serbian entity to name streets in honor of January 9th; the statehood day of RS, a holiday which has banned by the Constitutional Court as discriminatory against non-Serbs in the entity. Mayors of several municipalities are prepared to follow Dodik's call, while all political powers of RS supported his proposal. Banja Luka, the capital of RS has already a street with the name "after January 9th" but its Mayor said that a more impressive one would be found to be renamed. The Mayor of Bijeljina Mico Micic, has confirmed that the town square will be named "after January 9th." Dodik has announced that there will be a lavish celebration of the day in Banja Luka. However a conference will be held in the same day in Srebrenica about the protection of the civil rights of post-war returnees and democratization in RS,

organized by the Bosniak former Mayor of Srebrenica Camil Durakovic and the Mothers of Srebrenica victims' rights group. (www.balkaninsight.com)

January 6th, the Chairman of the tripartite presidency Dragan Covic (Croat) claimed that amendments of the country's electoral law represents a key task that should be implemented; "A key task remained, the electoral law, which we have to finish, and it is the reason why our European path suffered, and why we did not fulfill the Questionnaire of the European Commission," said Covic. Speaking about scheduled projects Covic said "Now, we can present our infrastructure plans for the next four years, because I am sure that B&H will be on its way to the EU at the end of this cycle, and this entire area will join the EU." (www.sarajevotimes.com)



Chairman of B&H Presidency

Dragan Covic

(Photo source: www.predsjednistvobih.ba)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Country faces several functional and institutional problems (Bosnia's Federation entity has not adopted 2018 budget yet, etc). Celebration of "statehood day" in RS (January 9th, 2018) may rise divisive rhetoric in the country. Security situation stable; no major threats.



BULGARIA: January 1st,

Bulgaria took over the EU Presidency from Estonia. Its mandate will last until June 30th, 2018. According to an announcement the Bulgarian presidency will focus on four key areas; future of Europe and young people, security and stability, Western Balkans, and digital economy. The country will run its program under the motto "United we stand strong", which is also the motto of the coat of arms of Bulgaria. (www.seenews.com, www.eu2018bg.bg)



The symbol of the Bulgarian Presidency

(Photo source: www.eu2018bg.bg)

- January 2nd, Bulgarian President Roumen Radev vetoed the new anti-corruption law claiming that it is insufficient to deal with the problem of corruption in the state. President's action puts under question the entire bill and only some of its provisions. According to the President's office announcement "These measures, albeit necessary, are insufficient to effectively counteract of corruption, as society expects it to be." The new law envisions the merger of several institutions currently tasked with fighting corruption, such as the Department in the State Agency for National Security, the Government's Commission on fighting corruption and the Asset Forfeiture Commission. Among its controversial provisions is that it does not allow the anonymous complaint of corruption incidents but the complaint should

provide his full name, national ID number and contact information. Furthermore the law would give the new anti-corruption body the right to authorize wire-tapping officials, even though it has no investigative powers, meaning that the results of such special surveillance would not be admissible in court. At most, the body would be able to forward its evidence to the prosecutor's office, which would have to obtain its own wire-tapping warrants. Consequently this could lead to the body being used as a tool to stifle political dissent and even target members of the media. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Bulgaria focuses its efforts on the EU Presidency which in fact is a challenging test for the country. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: January 2nd, the Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte met in Vienna and they expressed their concern over the Croatian – Slovenian border dispute in Piran Bay. Kurz said he was “*very upset*“ over the situation between the two fellow EU countries adding that he wished to “*contribute towards a positive solution to the dispute.*“ Rutte agreed with the Austrian Chancellor and expressed also his will to contribute positively in resolving the dispute. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr, www.total-croatia-news.com)

- January 3rd, Croatia reacted in Slovenia's decision to implement unilaterally the arbitration award over the border dispute calling it to resolve the issue through the dialogue. Slovenia threatens the Croat fishermen who will fish in the disputed waters of the Piran Bay with high fines. Croatian

Foreign Minister Marija Pejcinovic Buric said that these threats are “*Completely inappropriate, meaningless, and impossible.*” Pejcinovic claimed that the problem cannot be resolved with unilateral actions and through the dialogue could be found a solution. The Minister concluded that “*This is Croatian territory which is undeniable, and no Slovenian laws can be implemented in the territory of the Republic of Croatia.*” Furthermore Pejcinovic claimed that if Slovenia tries to act unilateral this would mean “*changing or attempting to change the situation with violent means and this is certainly not allowed under the international law.*” In the question how Croatia would respond in such a case the Minister said that the state would protect its interests with its entire means. (www.total-croatia-news.com)

- January 7th, the Croatian Government has not decided yet for the new fighter jet of the Air Force although the final decision was supposed to be made until the end of last year. It seems that the decision making process has been halted and it is not clear when it could be restarted. There are rumors that one of the bidders tries to improve its bid and this is the reason of the delay. It seems that the bidder is the Swedish SAAB which offers the JAS 39 GRIPENS fighter jet. Tender has been concluded and the Government has to decide to submit a request for the so-called best and final offer. A few days ago the Defense Minister Damir Krsticevic met with a delegation of Sweden which included SAAB leadership and it is assumed that the fighter jet was among their discussion topics. (www.total-croatia-news.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Tension with Slovenia rises and determined messages are sent by both sides. The EU and its

member states also express their concern over the dispute. Security risk rises slightly and situation is monitored although tension remains in political level exclusively.



CYPRUS: January 3rd, Cyprus acquired from Israel its first offshore patrol vessel. The Ministry of Defense announced that the official ceremony for enlisting the vessel in the National Guard will take place on January 15, at the Evangelos Florakis Naval Base in Paphos. The vessel was bought as part of a bilateral agreement with Israel and was constructed in Haifa's shipyards. It is 62 metres long and eight metres wide, weighs 450 tonnes, can reach 2,500 nautical miles and has a speed of 32 knots. It is equipped with automatic guns and is capable of carrying anti-aircraft missiles. Thirty members of Cyprus' navy have been in Israel since September 2017, receiving training for the specific vessel. The vessel is expected to strengthen the navy and enhance the role of Cyprus as a security contributor to the wider region. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 5th, Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides announced that Cyprus will proceed with plans to submit coordinates to safeguard its entire exclusive economic zone (EEZ) whether Turkey likes it or not. On the stance of the international community as regards Turkey's claims to the EEZ of the Republic of Cyprus, Kasoulides referred to the law of the Sea Treaty which clearly defines how the relations of the states are governed in relation to the EEZ of each one of them. Turkey, Kasoulides said, is not a signatory of this treaty, and it is the only one that has recently voted against the obligations of the states. *"It is clear to all that Turkey acts arbitrarily by its power in the*

region," the Minister said. He added that procedures are at their final stage and that the decision as to when these coordinates will be submitted will depend on Turkish provocative actions in the Mediterranean, *"especially with the new drill they bought and threaten to use."* (www.cyprus-mail.com, www.cna.org.cy)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus entered in pre-electoral period due to the coming presidential elections scheduled for January 28th, 2018. Security risk rises in the region due to the imminent sea drills for gas and oil research and the Turkish reactions which remains in rhetoric level at the moment.



F.Y.R.O.M: January 5th, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg will pay an official visit in Skopje in January 17 – 18th, 2018. Stoltenberg's visit is not irrelevant with the current intense diplomatic activity over the resolution of the "name" dispute between Greece and F.Y.R.O.M. Stoltenberg will meet with President Gjorge Ivanov, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov, Defense Minister Radmila Sekerinska, and the opposition Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) leader Hristijan Mickovski. Moreover Stoltenberg will deliver a speech in the Parliament. (www.mia.mk)

- January 5th, Deputy Prime Minister in charge for the EU affairs Bujar Osmani will pay a working visit in Athens in January 9th, 2018. Osmani will meet with the Greek Foreign Minister Nikos

Kotzias and Alternate Foreign Minister Giorgos Katrougalos in charge for European Affairs and International Economic Relations. Osmani will have separate meetings with the two Greek officials. (www.mia.mk)



Deputy Prime Minister, Bujar Osmani

(Photo source: www.sobranie.mk)

- January 6th, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev gave an interview in the portal www.mkd.mk claiming that he is quite optimistic for the “name” dispute resolution with Greece. Zaev sees that both countries are more prepared and determined to solve the problem comparing with the past. He strongly believes that there will be a mutual accepted solution until the end of June 2018. Zaev emphasized that both sides should compromise because benefits for a possible solution will be much more. He underlined that F.Y.R.O.M suffered from the long-term dispute and the country learned its lessons from the past’s mistakes. F.Y.R.O.M’s Prime Minister said that the state’s President and parliamentary opposition should participate in the whole process aiming at national political consensus on the issue. Finally Zaev underlined that if a solution is not reached then *“instead of us in Europe, we have to bring Europe here.”* (www.mia.mk, www.mkd.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Newly elected Government works intensively in stabilizing political situation both inside and

outside the country. Resolution of the “name” dispute with the neighboring Greece is the most challenging task “opening the gates” of the Euro-Atlantic integration for the country.



GREECE: January 2nd, the MP of Independent Greeks party (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες – ANEL) Kostas Katsikis has suggested the party could support a compromise solution over the name dispute with Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *“ANEL will obey to what the majority decides. We shall respect the principle of majority rule, should the majority go against the national interest,”* Katsikis said. The party leader and Defense Minister Panos Kammenos has so far stated he would reject any prospective deal which would include the word “Macedonia” in any new name that could come out of negotiations with F.Y.R.O.M. creating turbulences in governmental cohesion. (www.ekathimerini.com, www.thenationalherald.com)

- January 2nd, in an effort to de-escalate political reactions the Government’s spokesman Dimitris Tzanakopoulos said that a decision by the Supreme Court last January not to extradite the eight Turkish servicemen is irrevocable, but clarified that the granting of asylum is something completely different. *“They cannot be extradited, regardless of the outcome of their asylum applications. There is nothing secret here.”* he said. The move prompted opposition parties to accuse the Government of interfering with justice and attempting to lay the groundwork for their extradition to Turkey. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- January 5th, Following a high level inter-governmental meeting over the “name” dispute with F.Y.R.O.M, leader of Independent Greeks party (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες – ANEL) and ruling

coalition partner Panos Kammenos hinted that he may have shifted slightly from his hardline stance not to accept the term “Macedonia” in any possible solution. Speaking to reporters he reiterated that the use of the “Greek term Macedonia” is a non-starter and expressed hope that “any solution given is one that will safeguard national interests and will be accepted by all in the political world.” Moreover, Kammenos said there were two “landmark decisions” in the negotiations – the one in 1992 by the Council of Political Party Leaders that established the Greek stance that the word “Macedonia” should not be used in a solution and the one taken in 2008 at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008, where Athens vetoed F.Y.R.O.M’s accession to the alliance until the dispute is resolved. Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias has repeatedly claimed that the Government is “negotiating for a composite name, something that Greece had presented as its position in Bucharest.” By describing both the 1992 and the Bucharest decisions as “landmarks,” Kammenos hinted that he could base his stance on the latter rather, than strictly adhering to the former which categorically ruled any use of “Macedonia”. Another hint of a slight shift in Kammenos’s stance was his expression of confidence in way Kotzias is dealing with the negotiations. Meanwhile, reports from Thessaloniki suggest that demonstrations and rallies are being planned to protest the possible use of a composite name that includes the term “Macedonia”. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Political and security stability. Encouraging signals from the economy front. Diplomatic initiatives for resolving the “name” dispute with F.Y.R.O.M may cause political tension without

excluding possible social reactions and protests. Low level security incidents (violation of F.I.R and/or territorial sea by fighter jets and navy or coast guard vessels respectively) in the Aegean Sea by Turkey maintain an atmosphere of “security tension.”



KOSOVO: January 3rd, the Kosovo Government is determined to transform Kosovo Security Force (Forca e Sigurisë së Kosovës – KSF) into Armed Forces. The Government program foresees the draft law on Army to be proceeded to the Assembly by the end of April 2018. Bekim Collaku, advisor to the President Hashim Thaci said that the President’s Office undertook also an initiative for the transformation of KSF into an Army but this legal initiative has been suspended temporarily. According to Collaku, Kosovo’s international strategic partners requested from the Presidency to suspend temporarily the transformation of KSF into an Army in order to make the transformation through the constitutional amendments. He underlined that the consent of all communities is needed to change the constitution. Collaku claimed “*We are at the final phase of the comprehensive campaign for the Kosovo army. We will not wait indefinitely. The first part of the year is a suitable time to complete this process. Kosovo needs its army and has no time to lose.*” (www.gazetaexpress.com, www.koha.net)

- January 5th, Serbs who visit a church in Kosovo city of Gjakova/Djakovica for Christian Orthodox Christmas each year postponed their trip after local Kosovo Albanians said they would stage a protest. The Association of Serbs from Djakovica accused “unknown people” of creating a climate of “hysteria” and potential violence ahead of the visit, and said it would request an urgent meeting

with international institutions in Kosovo and officials in Pristina. The Association released a statement claiming “*We are not frightened. We continue the struggle to reclaim our dignity, human and religious rights.*” Kosovo Albanians in Gjakova/Djakovica had announced they would hold a peaceful protest to against “*the visit by Serbian criminals in the name of a pilgrimage.*” They accuse some of the pilgrims of being responsible for crimes committed during the Kosovo war. Sava Janjic, the abbot of the Visoki Decani Serbian Orthodox monastery in Kosovo, lamented the cancellation of the Serbs’ visit. “*So sad that Kosovo remains a territory in Europe where Christians can’t celebrate Christmas in peace,*” Janjic wrote on Twitter. (www.balkaninsight.com)



Visoki Decani Serbian Orthodox monastery in Kosovo

(Photo source: www.kosovo.net)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. International presence guarantees security, law and order in the state. Kosovo which is not a UN member is quite far from the Euro-Atlantic path

due to structural and institutional problems. Ethnic division between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs is always a possible source of violence.



MOLDOVA: January 2nd, the Constitutional Court of Moldova suspended President Igor Dodon because of his deliberate and repeating refusal to execute his constitutional obligations, such as appointing ministers upon the request of the Prime-Minister. Apart from that the Constitutional Court allowed the Parliament Speaker or the Prime Minister to sign the decrees on appointing the seven new Ministers proposed by the leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM), Vlad Plahotniuc, including one Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration. As a response, Dodon called the decision of the Court “shameful” and the Court itself “a hostage of its own uninspired decisions.” According to the Moldovan Constitution, the President can reject a law or a decree from the Government only once with a motivation. (www.moldova.org)

- January 5th, The Constitutional Court of Moldova temporarily suspended President Igor Dodon after he repeatedly vetoed the “anti-propaganda law” adopted by the Parliament. The High Court also decided that the respective law would be promulgated by an interim President; either the Parliament Speaker or the Prime Minister. The decision motivates that the President had to promulgate the law despite his doubts about its constitutionality. In response, Dodon declared in a Facebook post that “*what the government does with the help of the Constitutional Court will not go away without consequences.*” Moreover, he promised to retaliate after the parliamentary elections,

accusing the Court members who have dual Romanian citizenship of lack of loyalty. The President believes the “anti-propaganda law” is an obvious violation of the right to information in Moldova, drawing the attention that some media outlets that openly promotes the “liquidation of the statehood of the Republic of Moldova” are not punished. For Dodon, the suspension is the third temporary suspension from his Presidency seat because of his repeated veto on proposals of the Government, as it was in the recent case of the seven Ministers, or those of the Parliament, as it is in the case of the “anti-propaganda law”. (www.moldova.org)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political life is “hostage” of the pro-Russian President Igor Dodon and pro-Western Government rivalry which undermines the institutional function of the country. In the wider framework Moldova is between the Euro-Atlantic structures on the one hand and the Russian influence on the other. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore” for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: January 4th, Democratic Alliance (Demokratski savez - DEMOS) and Social Democratic Party (Социјалдемократска партија Црне Горе – SDP) are very close in establishing a political alliance which is more or less a reply in the Civic Movement United Reform Action (Građanski Pokret Ujedinjena reformska akcija – URA) and Democratic Montenegro (Demokratska Crna Gora – DCG) recent announcement on forming a coalition. Leaders of the two parties Miodrag Lekic and Ranko Krivokapic will meet in January

2018 to talk on the coalition. An anonymous source claimed in www.cdm.me portal “*This could be the response to the media announcement of the coalition between Aleksa Becic (DCG) and Dritan Abazovic (URA). Local elections in Podgorica are of paramount importance after the parliamentary elections, so the two leaders will consider the option of getting into coalition to achieve a better result.*” (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Montenegro’s accession in NATO creates a political, economic, and security euphoria in the country.



ROMANIA: January 4th, Romania’s National Prognosis Commission (CNP) presented an optimistic view on the country’s economy in 2018. According to CNP’s latest prognosis, Romania’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will increase by 5.5% this year, to 199 billion Euros. The GDP per capita will thus reach 10,245 Euros. The average number of employees in Romania’s economy should go up by 4.2% in 2018, to 5.14 million people, while the number of unemployed should go down to 351,000 standing for an unemployment rate of 3.9%. The average net wage is expected to increase by 11%, to 574 Euros. (www.romania-insider.com)

- January 4th, “Power games” between the Prime Minister Mihai Tudose, and the leader of the ruling Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD) Liviu Dragnea affect in Government and party function. While Tudose would like to restructure his cabinet and cut the number of ministries, Dragnea is looking to organize a national congress that would reconfirm

that he has the party's support to continue as its President. The Romanian Government could be restructured so as to include only 16 ministries, instead of 24 at the present, according to Niculae Badalau, PSD's Executive President, who is second in command after Dragnea. The PSD National Executive Committee, which is due to meet on January 8th, 2018 will decide on the restructuring of the cabinet led by Prime Minister Mihai Tudose, Badalau also said. According to him, a "slimmer Government" made of 16 or 17 ministries would be the desired one." The National Executive Committee will also decide if the party needs to organize a Congress. However, another influential PSD leader, namely Deputy Prime Minister Paul Stanescu, said that a party Congress would not be a good solution. In his opinion, the Tudose Government should not be restructured as it works just fine as it is. (www.romania-insider.com)

- January 5th, The U.S. plans to spend more than 200 million dollars to repair and build U.S. military structures and installations on air bases that dot much of Eastern Europe, as part of an ongoing initiative to deter Russian aggression. The funds are part of the European Deterrence Initiative, or EDI. The list of military objectives to be revamped this year also includes the "Campia Turzii" military air base in Romania, which will undergo 3 million dollars revamping work, according to the Pentagon's budget for 2018. The U.S. will also modernize air bases in Estonia, Slovakia, Latvia, Hungary, Iceland, Luxembourg and Norway. (www.romania-insider.com, www.airforcetimes.com, www.congress.gov)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

The country enjoys political and security stability. Romania is upgrading in the operational planning of the U.S and NATO improving its military means and infrastructure.



SERBIA: January 4th, the Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin claimed "NATO unconditionally respects our neutrality, just as does the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Russian Federation and all other countries, but one of the reasons why it is respected and why in some future conflicts it would be respected is the strength of our army." He added "If you are weak, if you have no ability to stand behind your own decision and guarantee for it with your own strength, then your neutrality is not respected, then everyone will take from you, or from your country, what they need. This way, we will be militarily neutral, in any sort of world conflict we would remain militarily neutral, and everyone would respect our neutrality because it would make no sense to make a powerful enemy out of Serbia, especially when we are not that to anyone." However Vulin believes that Serbia has no fear to be engaged in a future conflict "Times have also changed since the NATO aggression (on Serbia), global circumstances have changed, I'm not sure that anyone can even think about attacking Serbia - and why, after all, would they." Finally the Minister emphasized that form of modern threats has changed "Other security threats that are not in any pact or in any country - terrorist, cyber threats, migrations, which, as a global crisis, carry with them numerous challenges and threats, and answers must be found to all of this. These are not the times of trenches and exchanges of artillery fire, these are the times when threats manifest themselves in

other ways and we are trying to respond to everything.” (www.b92.net, www.tanjug.rs)

- January 5th, According to media reports the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska napredna stranka – SNS) will hold a meeting on January 10th, 2018 to discuss possible early parliamentary elections in coming spring. National elections would potentially be held alongside the local elections in the capital, Belgrade, which is where otherwise weak opposition parties have the strongest core of voters. (www.balkaninsight.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The possibility of early parliamentary elections is monitored since the ruling coalition enjoys a relatively strong majority in the Parliament. Security situation is stable although the Kosovo issue creates a fragile balance.



SLOVENIA: January 4th, The Piran Bay has become the central theatre of Slovenia's efforts to enforce the decision of the border arbitration tribunal, which awarded some 80% of the bay to Slovenia last June. As of December 30th, 2017 Croatian boats face high fines for fishing in Slovenian waters without permits, which already seems to have an impact. The Slovenian Interior Ministry has confirmed that Slovenian police have started treating Croatian vessels on December 30th, 2017 the deadline for implementation preparations, in line with the provisions of the foreigners act. The fine for illegal entry into Slovenian waters stands between 500 and 1,200 Euros, while fishermen fishing illegally or denying access to inspectors are even looking at fines of up to 41,000 Euros.

The key issue for the Croatian fishermen, many of whom have family on the Slovenian side or would like to cross Slovenia to get the fish market in Trieste, is that Slovenia can deny them entry if they refuse to pay the fines. (www.sloveniantimes.com)

- January 6th, Slovenia enjoys the highest monthly income last year while F.Y.R.O.M the lowest. Slovenia citizens received the highest average salary in the region (over 1,000 Euros). In October 2017, (the only available data) they earned 1,056 Euros on average, followed by Croats who received 795 Euros in the same month. The average monthly incomes in Bosnia and Herzegovina amounted to 436 Euros, in Serbia 399 Euros, and in F.Y.R.O.M 381 Euros. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Tension with Croatia rises although it remains in political level exclusively. Slovenia looks fully determined to implement the arbitration award acting unilaterally. Security situation is closely monitored



TURKEY: January 3rd, leaving the tensions of 2017 behind, Ankara claims it is ready for a new period in its relationship with Brussels, as both sides have been showing a willingness to make moves to overcome problems. Speaking at a press meeting Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu said that if the EU starts to act more respectfully to Turkey, relations would be healthier. *"It is not possible to come up with a solution with countries like Turkey otherwise. The Turkish public deserves this. From now on, this patronizing period has come to an end,"* he said, adding that the EU eventually started to understand this and

should actually revise itself.
(www.dailysabah.com)

- January 3rd, a Court in Turkey's southeastern Sırnak province sentenced an MP from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi - HDP) to a year and nine months in prison after convicting her for "insulting the president." HDP Sırnak Deputy Leyla Birlik had been remanded in custody on November 4th, 2016 but she was released later after four months. In November 2016, 13 HDP lawmakers were arrested, and 10 of them, including HDP co-chairs Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksekdag; they remain in custody awaiting trial on terrorism-related charges. The lawmakers face prosecution under anti-terrorism legislation after their parliamentary immunity was lifted. The HDP has been accused of having links to the PKK, which is listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the U.S, and the EU.
(www.dailysabah.com)

- January 4th, the Turkish Armed Forces plans to form a new regimental command consisting of two battalions and four units regarding the S-400 anti-aircraft missile defense system. Each system will include missile launch pads, long-range radars and command-control vehicles. All the instruments comprising the system will be deployed over wheeled vehicles so they can easily be transferred to different regions in case of a crisis. Last week Ankara officially signed the 2.5 billion dollars agreement with Russia to purchase S-400 missile defense systems. The deal would make Turkey the first NATO member to own the system. Turkey will buy two S-400 ground-to-air missile batteries from Russia, with the first delivery planned for the first quarter of 2020,

according to the agreement.
(www.dailysabah.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Turkey faces several restrictions in freedom of expression and human rights. Elected MPs and journalists are in custody or convicted by the state Courts. In southeastern region of the country there is an ongoing armed conflict between the state's security forces and Kurd guerillas. The country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of persecution of citizens. Significant security concerns.

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NOTE

■ Stable situation. No security risk

■ Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored

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

■ Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk

■ Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed conflict