

JANUARY 29 – FEBRUARY 04, 2018 – ISSUE 11



**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” 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.

“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 © 2018

“HERMES” Institute for Foreign Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy

All rights reserved



ALBANIA: January 29th - February 3rd, strong reactions were raised in Albania due to an interview of the Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias who stated that Albania has agreed the extension of the Greek territorial waters in 12 miles within the common maritime borders between Albania and Greece. Moreover Kotzias said that the Cham issue was not talked during the two countries discussions although the Albanian side tried to put it on the table. Apart from that during a meeting of the ruling Socialist Party (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS), Prime Minister Edi Rama unveiled that a new strategic document related to numerous sensitive issues is expected to be signed between Albania and Greece in the near future. *“We are currently experiencing a positive moment in the dialogue between Albania and Greece. I share the attitude of my Greek counterpart Alexis Tsipras that a new document of strategic partnership will be soon signed between the two countries. Of course we should wait for the written end of this dialogue focused on sensitive issues like the law of war, Cham issue, and maritime pact,”* Rama stated. The nationalist Party for Justice, Integrity and Unity (Partia Drejtësi, Integrim dhe Unitet – PDIU) asked the Albanian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to inform Albanians about the progress of the talks with Greece, regarding the Cham case. Reminding the resolution entered into effect in 2012. *“We demand the Prime Minister and the Foreign Ministry to inform the Albanian citizens, especially Cham Albanians, about the progress of the talks that affect more than 300,000 citizens, who expect the Albanian authorities to resolve this matter with reciprocity. 20% of the Cham Albanians were killed and 80% were moved through an ethnic cleansing never-before-seen in Europe. Our Foreign Ministry has*

the constitutional obligation for reciprocity and to inform the Chameria association for raising a monument and cemetery for thousands of Cham Albanians who were killed not in a war, but on the steps of their homes,” the PDIU stated. The Chairwoman of the Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim – LSI) Monika Kryemandhi strongly criticized the Government’s decision to accept the extension of the Greek territorial waters in 12 nautical miles; *“This man [Prime Minister Edi Rama] after destroying relationship with Greece by ruining the Churches as in Communism, now donates the sea begging for little mercy from Greece,”* said Kryemandhi. The President of Albania, Ilir Meta, reacted also about the maritime border agreement with Greece claiming he is following the matter very closely and that as President, he will act by respecting the Constitution and his public, political and legal responsibilities. The former Albanian Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, accused Edi Rama of selling the maritime territory to Greece; *“The Greek Foreign Minister said they have received 12 miles from Albania. Whoever thinks this is just propaganda from Greece is lying to himself. Rama gave the biggest gas fields of the Mediterranean to Greece. Our agreement made these areas belonged 100% to Albania,”* Berisha claimed. However the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted regarding the maritime border talks with Greece releasing a statement *“Delimitation of marine zones is of common interest to both countries, in terms not only to finally determine the limits of exercising their sovereignty and sovereign rights in these spaces, but also in terms of their economic exploitation. The decision of the Constitutional Court overruled the agreement signed between the two countries in 2009. In the absence of an agreement between them since 2013, parties have conducted*

a series of exploratory discussions to find a viable solution to this issue. In the course of these discussions, the unwavering position of the Albanian side has firmly been and remains the conclusion of an agreement on the delimitation of maritime zones based upon the principles of the Convention on the Law of the Sea where both countries are parties, the international practice, the decision of the Constitutional Court and respective domestic legislation which will enable a fair and acceptable delimitation for both countries. This unwavering position is the starting point for experts who will conduct negotiations with the Greek side on this issue. Any other interpretation by political actors is malicious aimed at relativizing, or even worse, denying past mistakes.” On February 3rd, 2018 the civil society held a protest in front of the Prime Minister’s Office, opposing what they consider giving away 12 miles of sea territory to Greece. Protesters have called the Prime Minister to give explanations about the agreement and asked professionals to give a legal solution to this matter. (www.albaniannews.com, www.top-channel.tv, www.punetejashtme.gov.al)

- January 31st – February 1st, the Minister of Justice Etilda Gjonaj’s decision to allow extradition of Nazer Seiti to Italy caused political tension in Albania. Seiti is known as the accountant of Moisi and Florian Habilaj drug clan. In the case of Habilaj brothers is involved the former Minister of Interior of the ruling Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë – PS) Saimir Tahiri. According to the opposition Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD) MP Enkelejd Alibeaj Seiti’s extradition was decided in a time that he was ready to cooperate with Albanian justice testifying about Habilaj – Tahiri case.

Alibeaj informed that DP has decided to call Gjonaj in an urgent interpellation accusing her of being the main responsible person for this illegal extradition; *“We are convinced that this urgent interpellation with the Minister of Justice will serve to further uncover the scheme of the Prime Minister Edi Rama to close the file of Saimir Tahiri’s involvement in international drug trafficking,”* said Alibeaj. According to the Albanian law it is prohibited the extradition of a person when he faces criminal proceedings in Albania. Gjonaj claimed that she was unaware that Seiti was under investigation by country’s authorities. Before the parliamentary session tension was raised due to the fact bodyguards made physical control to all opposition MPs causing their strong reactions. DP’s MP Edi Paloka denounced this act declaring that MPs cannot be treated as criminals or terrorists. Moreover DP’s MPs blocked the podium forcing Speaker Gramoz Ruci to interrupt the session. Finally Ruci expelled DP Chairman Edmond Spaho for violating the Parliament’s regulation. All the opposition MPs continued to protest, insult, and generate noise during the session. According to DP leader Lulzim Basha Seiti’s extradition to Italy aimed at protecting the former Minister of Interior Saimir Tahiri. Tahiri’s arrest based on Seiti’s testimony would be the first “big fish” in the fight against organized crime and corruption in Albania claimed Basha. The Chairwoman of the Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim – LSI) Monika Kryemandhi required the arrest of the Prime Minister Edi Rama; *“Nazer Seiti’s extradition to Italy was the last proof needed for Premier Rama’s arrest. This action was come from Rama’s fear for Seiti’s testimony against the former Interior Minister Saimir Tahiri,”* Ktyemandhi said. She underlined that Rama will

not escape from justice after this clear violation of law reaffirming the continuation of protests against the Government. (www.albaniannews.com)

- January 31st, according to the Albanian Foreign Ministry Greece and Albania have agreed to remove the War Law. This action will remove obstacles for Albanian citizens whose properties were seized during the World War II. According to Albanian broadcaster “Top Channel” the agreement will not have retroactive effect, meaning that former owners will be unable to be compensated for their properties, which have been exploited by third parties for the past 78 years. The Foreign Ministry claimed the War Law will be removed with a Presidential decree that will be equalized to the royal decree of 1940 which led to the seizing of all properties that Albanian citizens had in the Greek territory. In 1966, another decree confirmed the one of 1940. Greece will repeal this law in Parliament. According to the “Top Channel” this will make way for returning the property confiscated by the Greek state to the Albanian owners. However the “Cham” Albanians will not benefit because their properties were confiscated because they were collaborators of the Nazis and Fascists during the war. (www.top-channel.tv)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

Seiti's extradition has raised concerns over rule of law and fight against corruption in Albania creating “grey shadows” over Government's transparency and determination against corruption and organized crime. Opposition continues its hard rhetoric against the Government but it is estimated that still does not have the necessary political power and capability

to accelerate possible political developments namely topple of the Government and early elections. The ongoing normalization of Albanian – Greek relations brings closer Albania towards the beginning of negotiation talks for accession in the EU. However bilateral agreements in sensitive issues and mainly in the Cham issue and maritime borders may cause strong political and social reactions. It seems Albanian Government is determined to compromise with Greece in order to open accession negotiations with the EU. Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.



BOSNIA &

HERZEGOVINA: January 29th, Republica Srpska (RS) President Milorad Dodik put under question the state's representation in the highest level regarding the tripartite meeting of Turkey, Serbia, and Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) in Istanbul. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will host his Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vucic while B&H will be represented by the member of the tripartite presidency Bakir Izetbegovic (Bosniac) and not by the current Chairman of the presidency Dragan Covic (Croat). According to Dodik *“It is a serious precedent that only one member of the Presidency of B&H is participating in Istanbul talks today, and not the Chairman. It is dangerous for B&H, and it comes from those who have persistently sought to portray itself as its defenders, what Bakir Izetbegovic does, and in fact it destroys the essence of the state's institutions and existence.”* Commenting on Turkey's meeting he said that the RS has excellent relations with Serbia, and that Turkey *“interferes in B&H dramatically providing direct support to Bosniaks.”* Stating that he does not know what will be the topic of the

Istanbul meeting, he claimed that a new practice is being introduced by sending a member of the Presidency of B&H to present itself as a representative of country in these talks. *“As far as I understand, this is not the decision of the Presidency of B&H, but the decision of Izetbegovic and possibly Erdogan’s decision. Vucic is not the one who can influence the meeting because he is visiting Turkey,”* Dodik concluded. (www.klix.ba)

- January 29th, the trilateral meeting of the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, B&H presidency member Bakir Izetbegovic, and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic which was held at the Mabeyn Palace in Istanbul focusing on political and economic cooperation with a special focus on infrastructure projects. Main topic of the talks was the construction of the Sarajevo-Belgrade highway, which is supported by Turkey. Turkey appears as an investor and advocate for this project, while Serbia and B&H must determine the road route. Serbia has already noted that it will agree on any route and that it is on B&H to make the final decision. There are two possible routes; the first one would connect Sarajevo and Belgrade via Tuzla and Bijeljina. This option is supported in the Federation of B&H, but also by some of the parties in the RS. The second one would connect the capitals of B&H and Serbia over Visegrad, i.e. eastern part of B&H and would be continued through Vardiste and connected with Serbian highway, is supported by authorities of the RS. Proposal for construction of both of routes, including the one over Tuzla and the one over Visegrad, was adopted at the meeting in Istanbul facilitating progress of the project. It is important to note that this project will be fully financed by Turkey, whose companies will construct the fast road but they

will hire domestic workers. They will use the so-called BOT (Build – Operate – Transfer) model which means that Turkey will fully finance the road construction, and it will charge the use of it for a certain period of time in a form of concession and then hand it over to B&H and Serbia. Critical point of the project is that B&H institutions which are in charge should approve it. (www.klix.ba, www.sarajevotimes.com)



Meeting of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, and Member of the B&H Presidency Bakir Izetbegovic

(Photo source: www.tccb.gov.tr)

- January 30th, the Republika Srpska (RS) Minister of Internal Affairs Dragan Lukac stated that there are no paramilitary organizations or a possible plan for their formation in the RS, unlike the Federation of B&H (FB&H) has more than 100 relative cases. *“The RS Ministry of Internal Affairs will not allow neither the ‘Serbian Honor’ nor ‘Wahhabists’ or other organization to disturb the citizens. There are no paramilitary units in the RS, and this story about paramilitary groups has political motives targeting the President Milorad Dodik,”* said Lukac. Speaking about the organization "Serbian Honor", Lukac reminded that it is not registered in the RS, but in Nis (Serbia). The ‘Serbian Honor’ in RS has eight

members or sympathizers, and this is the RS Ministry of Interior data. Three or four people had problems with the law, and the MUP RS filed complaints against them, and for certain acts they were convicted.” Commending Minister of Security Dragan Mektic statements that young boys and children from the RS are trained in military camps in Russia, Lukac said that the RS Ministry of the Interior does not have such records and asked what kind of parents would send their children for training in a military camp. “It’s incredible that parents send their children to training in military camps,” Lukac noted, asking Mektic to deliver the children’s names. He stressed that there are no enclaves in the RS, or Wahhabi communities, or anything that could endanger the safety of citizens, unlike the FB&H. “We can talk about 17 registered people who went with their ID cards from the Republika Srpska to the battlefield. Eight of them returned, and there are currently six in the Republika Srpska, members of radical Islamist groups, but under the control of the MUP [Ministarstvo Unutrasnih Poslova – Ministry of Interior],” said Lukac. According to the Minister there are people in the FB&H who are walking on the city with uniforms and that members of the “Green Berets” wear uniforms at various events, while the Ministry of Security of B&H never reacted to such cases. “There is also problem with the air soft clubs in the FB&H. There are six registered clubs in the RS that do not provide training unlike the FB&H in which training takes place on the model of special units,” Lukac claimed emphasizing members of air soft clubs in the FB&H wear uniform carrying fascist symbols. He assessed that security situation in the RS is satisfactory, but always one should take into consideration people of the state who are members of certain radical extremist movements.

“We must be prepared to face terrorist attacks and we have to keep an eye on these matters, although RS MUP’s reports could guarantee to our citizens that security situation in the RS is satisfactory,” Lukac added. (www.klix.ba)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. RS rhetoric for greater autonomy remains active. Security situation stable; no major threats.



BULGARIA: January 29th, “We are working on the signing of agreements in the field of maritime and railway transport with Serbia,” announced the Minister of Transport, Information Technology and Communications Ivaylo Moskovski following the meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure of Serbia Zorana Mihajlovic. The Minister of Regional Development and Public Works Nikolay Nankov also attended the meeting. Among the main topics of discussion was the connectivity and integration of the Western Balkans with the EU, which is one of the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The meeting also discussed reduction of roaming prices between the two states as well as concession procedures for the airports in Sofia and Belgrade. “Bulgaria is actively working to build the road and railway connection between Sofia and Kalotina,” indicated Minister Moskovski. There is an ongoing tender for the railway section Sofia – Voluyak, financed under Connecting Europe Facility, he added. Minister Moskovski recalled

there is a technical project ready for the railway line from Voluyak to Dragoman and tenders are to be announced at the beginning of 2019 the latest. *“Unless there are any significant delays with the tenders, in three years there will be a railway connection and system interoperability between Bulgaria and Serbia,”* he said. Mihajlovic announced that the section to the Bulgarian border is a priority for their country as well and financing is already provided for the electrification of the railway line from Nis to Kalotina. Expert talks between the two parties are to take place to discuss the Agreement for cross-border railway traffic between Bulgaria and Serbia. Minister Nankov informed his Serbian counterpart that the Bulgarian party has initiated tenders for the road section from Sofia to Kalotina and the actual construction works in the area is about to start in 2018. (www.mtitc.government.bg.com)

- February 2nd, according to business and trade organizations Bulgarian and F.Y.R.O.M companies are interested in doing more business together and make new investments in both countries' markets due to the fact that Bulgaria and F.Y.R.O.M signed a friendship treaty in August 2017. A recent survey by the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry showed the number of Bulgarian companies expressing an interest in business opportunities in F.Y.R.O.M doubled in January 2018 compared to the same period last year. While China remains the biggest market of interest for Bulgarian enterprises, 24% of participants in the survey said they would like to visit F.Y.R.O.M promoting business partnerships there. Lubomir Levicharov, an economic expert in the chamber, says the friendship treaty should lead to new infrastructure projects. The Prime Ministers of Bulgaria and

F.Y.R.O.M, Boyko Borissov and Zoran Zaev, signed the landmark treaty, which had been negotiated for over a decade, in August 2017 in Skopje. Both countries' Parliaments ratified it in January 2018, putting the once fraught relationship between Skopje and Sofia on a new footing and bringing the two countries closer through an EU-oriented partnership. The treaty envisages Bulgarian support for F.Y.R.O.M's bid to join NATO and the EU, improving trade and transport infrastructure and easing customs and border formalities. Bulgaria was the sixth largest trade partner of F.Y.R.O.M in 2016 with a total exchange of some 430 million Euros, and a trade deficit on F.Y.R.O.M side of 41 million Euros. This was a decline of more than 9% compared to 2015. The most traded goods between the two countries by far are metals, such as lead, copper, zinc, and their concentrates. (www.novinite.com)

- February 2nd, The European Union is considering the possibility of holding a summit with the Turkish leadership, European Commission spokesman Alexander Winterstein said at a press conference. *“We are still considering the possibility of holding such a meeting, but I cannot confirm the date,”* Winterstein said. Earlier, the German Welt newspaper reported, referring to its own sources, that the EU and Turkey are planning a summit in late March 2018. According to the edition of the forum, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, European Council President Donald Tusk, President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, chairing the EU Council of Europe will join the meeting which may take place in Brussels or Sofia. Counter-terrorism,

energy, migration and student exchanges will be discussed. EU-Turkey relations have sharply worsened in the past year. The EU criticizes the human rights situation in the country after the coup attempt in Turkey, and Ankara reacted sharply to criticism. As former President Juncker said earlier, Turkey is moving away from the EU. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bulgaria focuses its efforts on the EU Presidency which in fact is a challenging test for the country. Its initiatives towards regional security and good neighboring (friendship agreement with F.Y.R.O.M, Western Balkans summit, initiative for EC – Turkey meeting etc) highlight its constructive role in the region as a factor of stability. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: January 30th, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said that Zagreb regretted that Slovenia keeps on pursuing its “*unacceptable policy of unilaterally implementing the arbitration decision from a process that Croatia withdrew from and a ruling that Croatia does not recognize,*” and underlined that Croatia would respond in the same way to fines issued by Slovenian Police against Croatian fishermen. “*According to the international law it is impossible to unilaterally implement a decision like that. This action of sending fines to our fishermen is deeply incorrect. It is a unilateral act. Being a serious country we have been prepared to reciprocate such actions and we will do so. Croatian Police will respond in the same way by issuing fines against Slovenian fishermen violating Croatian territorial waters. Croatia will*

clearly demonstrate its firmness stance,” stated Plenkovic. Croatian Prime Minister said that fishermen will not pay the fines; “*We will find a mechanism how to help them legally and reject these misdemeanor orders the Slovenian Police has sent,*” Plenkovic concluded. (www.total-croatia-news.com)

- January 30th, the President Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic has invited Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic for an official visit to Croatia. The invitation comes at a time when tension is running high between Zagreb and Belgrade. In a videotaped address, the President said she wanted to turn a new leaf in relations with Serbia, expressing a commitment to leading a sincere dialogue and resolving open issues in a positive atmosphere. “*I think the time has come for a presidential-level visit. In good faith that there is a mutual desire to overcome our differences and the events of the past that are holding us hostage, in the hope of making progress for our peoples, I have invited President Aleksandar Vucic for an official visit to Croatia in mid-February,*” the President said. The two countries have a number of issues weighing down relations, including the identification of war victims, the status of their respective minorities in both countries, and the border, to name a few. “*Our views on many issues differ, especially when it comes to those thrust upon us by the 20th century. Not only are they different, but sometimes or views are in complete opposition. But, I am convinced that Croats and Serbs can and want to find a path that will lead us to a better future,*” she said. The President's invitation comes on the heels of a diplomatic flap over a Holocaust exhibit dealing with Jasenovac, which Serbia organized at the UN headquarters in New York last week. Croatian officials accused Serbia of fabricating facts and sent a diplomatic

note protesting remarks made at the opening of the exhibit by Serbia's Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic. On Sunday, Serbia's Prime Minister, Ana Brnabic, said she did not see any reason for the note and added that perhaps Croatia should have participated in the exhibit. The Serbian president has yet to respond to the invitation. (www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

- January 31st, Minister of Defense Damir Krsticevic announced that his Ministry's public procurement practices would continue to be conducted openly and transparently. The Minister added that the biggest challenge continues to be the purchase of a new fighter aircraft. The final decision is expected to be made very soon. *"I don't play favorites with anyone. The only thing I favor is a good decision. The winning bid must have the best price, and be the best offer that includes all the necessary parameters. I favor what our expert committees say and I favor what's best for Croatia,"* underlined the Minister. Meanwhile, Igor Dragovan, the President of the Parliament's Defense Committee, commented on the ongoing process *"I'm not expediting the process in any way. I trust that those responsible for making the decision will communicate their choice once all the conditions have been met, because that's in the best interest of the Croatian public, and that's the only way to relieve the tension that has been building recently,"* said Dragovan. Croatia has to choose between various models of second-handed F-16 jets offered by Greece, Israel and U.S.A, while Sweden offered the JAS 39 GRIPPEN made by the SAAB industry. Croatia is seeking to purchase 12 aircrafts. (www.total-croatia-news.com, www.glashrvatske.hrt.hr)

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. It is estimated that both side will avoid escalation of situation despite that Slovenia has sent the first fines against Croat fishermen. Croatia looks determined to address such challenges by the Slovenian side. Security situation stable but is monitored although tension remains in political level exclusively so far.



CYPRUS: January 29th, Far-right National People's Front (Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο – ELAM) has named itself as the real winner of the presidential elections after its leader Christos Christou came in fourth in January 28th, 2018 first round, a development he sees as a major boost for a party that was only officially admitted to political life less than two years ago after it won two seats in Parliament in 2016. While the 5.65% of the votes it garnered in first round is not even in the double digits, it is the same difference that stands between President Nicos Anastasiades' 35.51% of votes and Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού – AKEL)-backed independent Stavros Malas' 30.24%. Spokesman of the party Geadis Geadis said they had met all three goals they had set for themselves – increasing the number of voters, boosting support and achieving fourth place. *"We never said we'd go to the second round, we were realistic with our goals and stayed grounded, as opposed to other candidates,"* Geadis told the Cyprus Mail. As the political bargaining begun to unfold ahead of the second round of elections set to take place on February 4th, 2018, ELAM had long since announced the party would be sending out a questionnaire to discover the intentions of the two

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT ■ :

candidates who would make it to the second round. Malas categorically stated he would do not respond and would not engage with ELAM. He was the only one of the main candidates to take this stance at the time. Democratic Rally (Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός - DISY) leader Averof Neophytou said that Anastasiades would answer Elam's questions but this did not mean a commitment to talks with the party. "*Nicos Anastasiades is not willing to change policy either on the Cyprus issue or on the economy,*" Neophytou said. As the different camps are trying to get as many votes as possible, what will happen remains to be seen. Though Anastasiades has not explicitly said he will cooperate with the far-right group, he did not rule it out, saying it was time to create political allegiances; "*After all, a majority seat in Parliament is required to pass bills into law,*" he said. ELAM's questions have focused on three main topics: the Cyprus problem, society and economic affairs. If and when answers are received, they will be made public, Geady said. ELAM's political bureau will then make a decision. Just because it so far appears that Anastasiades may be the only one to answer the questionnaire does not necessarily mean the party will support him in the second round, he added. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- January 29th, Turkey has issued a new NAVTEX (Navigational Warning) by which it has reserved for "military training" a large sea area off Famagusta Bay extending to within 30 km of the location of an upcoming gas drill in Cyprus' offshore block 3. NAVTEX 0153/18, issued by the Antalya Station, was effective on January 29th, 2018. The reserved area is some 3,740 square kilometers, starting from just 25 km off Cape Greco and covering a large part of block 3. At its southernmost boundary, the reserved area is

reportedly just 30 km from the target selected by ENI and KOGAS for conducting an exploratory drill in early February 2018. The entire area reserved by Turkey comes within the Nicosia Flight Information Region (FIR), which is almost interchangeable with Cyprus' Search and Rescue Area (SAR) of Responsibility. In response, Cyprus issued a NAVTEX of its own, notifying mariners to disregard the Turkish one. Turkish authorities issued a new NAVTEX (0155/18), claiming to nullify the Cypriot one which sought to nullify the original Turkish notice to mariners. Turkey appended in its new NAVTEX a rather political statement claiming "*The 'Republic of Cyprus' mentioned in NR 047/18 is not the original partnership state established in 1960. Therefore, activity NR FA66-0153/18 in territory, the exclusive economic zone, the continental shelf and SAR region of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is legal and in compliance with international law.*" In effect, Turkey claims that the area it reserved is part of the breakaway regime's continental shelf as well as its Search and Rescue Area of Responsibility. In recent months Ankara has escalated the use of navigational warnings around Cyprus, in an apparent bid to question the Republic's jurisdiction over the latter's SAR Area of Responsibility. Turkey does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus. The latest Turkish NAVTEX could also be seen as a warning of sorts to ENI, which plans to bring a drillship to block 3 sometime in the next few days. The SAIPEM 12000 drillship, leased by ENI, is currently located in block 6 – licensed to ENI and TOTAL. Once finished in block 6, the drillship will immediately head out to block 3, at a drilling site dubbed "Souppia" (Cuttlefish). Turkey maintains that Cyprus cannot unilaterally exploit its offshore

natural gas resources without including the Turkish Cypriots. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- February 4th, Incumbent Nicos Anastasiades was re-elected as Cyprus President in the second round of the elections with 55.99% of the vote, giving Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού – AKEL)-backed independent Stavros Mala 44.01%. Overall turnout, reached 73.97% slightly higher than that of the first round, but lower by almost seven points than the turnout for the 2013 presidential runoff. Malas conceded his defeat and congratulated Anastasiades. Everyone must work



Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades
(Photo source: www.presidency.gov.cy)

together as of tomorrow to tackle all the problems plaguing the country, President Nicos Anastasiades said after being re-elected for a second term. He was speaking at the “Tassos Papadopoulos-Eleftheria” stadium in Nicosia where a ceremony was held to officially declare his victory after he secured a comfortable win over his opponent. At the brief ceremony Chief Returning Officer Kypros Kyprianou read out the

presidential proclamation decree, issued by the Interior Minister, and proclaimed Anastasiades as the President. *“Mr Nicos Anastasiades, who, received more than 50 per cent of the overall valid ballots, has been elected President of the Republic,”* Kyprianou said. The President sent out a message of unity, and that he wants to start with a clean sheet; *“I scratch out everything that has been said during the election campaign period. What’s important is for everyone to work together to tackle the problems the country is facing,”* he said. People, he said, have given him a strong mandate and he called on all political powers to reunite to fight with him for meritocracy, to clamp down on corruption and achieve a solution to the Cyprus problem. *“We have a lot to do that is why I insist on unity. After today’s results, we have to understand that it is only through cooperation that we will achieve what we owe to the Cypriot people,”* Anastasiades said. He added that he wanted the opportunity to invite all, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, to understand that the current state of affairs *“cannot be the solution to the Cyprus problem”*. Andros Kyprianou, the leader of backers AKEL said: *“We are not satisfied with the vote but we respect the choice of the people. The fight doesn’t end here – it continues throughout next five years.”* He called on Anastasiades to convince AKEL that he considers the Cyprus problem a top priority, criticized the centrist parties and said that AKEL were the *“political and moral winners”* of the elections. AKEL whose candidate outright rejected any engagement with National People's Front (Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο – ELAM) during horse-trading over the past week, suggested that seven out of ten members of ELAM had voted Anastasiades. The centrist parties, Solidarity Movement (Κίνημα Αλληλεγγύη), the Greens (Πράσινοι), Movement for Social

Democracy (Κίνημα Σοσιαλδημοκρατών – EDEK), and Democratic Party (Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα - DIKO), who are seen as hardliners on the Cyprus issue offered grudging congratulations to Anastasiades but all warned that the problems they had highlighted throughout the campaign still remained. “*People expect the President and the Government to address seriously the issues that concern the country and to find solutions,*” DIKO said in a statement.

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The President Nicos Anastasiades re-elected in the second round of presidential elections extending his term for five more years. His clear mandate ensures political stability in the country. Cyprus question and economic affairs remain the main state’s concerns. Security risk in the region remains high due to the sea drills for gas and oil research in areas of the Cypriot EEZ by ENI – TOTAL Corporation. Turkish reactions remain in rhetoric level at the moment. However imminent drills by ENI in block 3 within the Cypriot EEZ which is also reserved by Turkish NAVTEX may escalate tension in the region. Announcement of the drill’s results by the ENI – TOTAL Corporation in the Cypriot offshore block 6 in February 2018 may also cause tension between Turkey and Cyprus.



F.Y.R.O.M: January 29th,

According to the Deputy Prime Minister Bujar Osmani the law on use of languages will be adopted despite rejection by the President Gjorge Ivanov. Ivanov refused to approve the law while the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска

револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство - VMRO-DPMNE) proposed various amendments on the law aiming at setting obstacles in the whole process. Osmani claimed that such behavior shows lack of responsibility regarding these issues. Moreover Osmani underlined that adoption of the law is in accordance with F.Y.R.O.M’s Constitution and the framework of the “Ohrid Agreement”. “*We will adopt the languages law despite the rejection of President Gjorge Ivanov to sign it and the attempt of the opposition VMRO-DPMNE party to obstruct it by submitting amendments,*” Osmani said adding that “*[the law] increases society’s cohesion, loyalty of ethnic communities in regard to the challenges that are ahead of us in the coming period. It is a lack of sense of responsibility and sensitivity regarding these issues. The law will be adopted but unfortunately Albanians will remember it as an issue in which a political party was against it.*” Political experts claimed that 32,000 amendments are a record number that would need several months to be deliberated. According to the ruling Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Социјалдемократски сојуз на Македонија–СДСМ – SDSM) opposition lawmakers returned to the Parliament not to debate, but to block the voting process. Artan Grupi, MP of SDSM told reporters that the negative approach of the VMRO-DPMNE, towards the law that makes Albanian language as the second official language in the country, could only slow the process down, but would not be able to stop it. In the meanwhile Parliament Speaker Talat Xhaferi postponed the debate on language law due to lack of quorum. (www.mia.mk, www.meta.mk)

- February 1st, the President Gjorge Ivanov met with the UN Special Envoy Matthew Nimetz in

Skopje. Ivanov said that a possible solution of differences between the two countries should be in accordance with the international law and international treaties. His country will continue to join dialogue constructively aimed at reaching a solution to the dispute imposed by Greece; a solution which will not encroach the identity of “Macedonian” people and will not undermine the dignity of “Macedonian” citizens. In the same day Nimetz met with F.Y.R.O.M’s Prime Minister Zoran Zaev presenting his opinion and ideas on the course of the name negotiations. Zaev briefed Nimetz about the coordination meeting with political leaders of the country. Both Zaev and Nimetz praised the benefits of the direct talks between Tsipras and Zaev in Davos where both parties expressed the will for solving the problem. Both men underlined the concrete steps of the two countries to establish mutual trust in the negotiation process namely the rename of the highway and airport in F.Y.R.O.M and regarding the Greek side to ratify the second phase of F.Y.R.O.M – EU Stabilization and Association Agreement as well as to support F.Y.R.O.M’s bid to join the Adriatic – Ionian Initiative. Zaev and Nimetz agreed that it is the right time to solve the dispute which exists for more than 25 years.

- February 3rd, the Albanian Minister of Interior, Fatmir Xhafaj paid a visit in F.Y.R.O.M where he met with his counterpart Oliver Spasovski. The two Ministers signed in Ohrid a memorandum of Police cooperation in the field of terrorism foreseeing exchange of information for individuals and groups that are considered potential perpetrators of terrorist actions not only in two countries but in the wider region. “Terrorism is a global threat but also a risk that the countries in the region are facing with. Today’s memorandum covers both preventive and

repressive ways of dealing with terrorism. Interior Ministries actively cooperates in protection and control of borders ensuring secure movement of people and goods,” Spasovski said. Minister Xhafaj underlined the importance of this cooperation; “*The matters that we discussed, regarding the fight against terrorism and organized crime, contribute to peace and safety not only in our countries but also in the entire region,”* Xhafaj said. One of the issues were discussed was the establishment of a Regional Police Cooperation Center for Western Balkans. This project, proposed by Xhafaj, has received support from various EU countries, from the European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos, and F.Y.R.O.M’s Minister of Interior Oliver Spasovski. Meeting also focused on cooperation between the two Ministries in fight against drug trafficking, people trafficking, weapon smuggling, exchange of information, positive and efficient practices, and opportunities for further cooperation not only between the two states but also in regional level. (www.mia.mk, www.top-channel.tv)

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” for the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country. Prime Minister Zaev works on achieving internal political cohesion towards an accepted name solution. However it is estimated that it is difficult for F.Y.R.O.M’s Parliament to achieve the required majority to modify its Constitution or to approve a mutual accepted name for the country.

President's Ivanov veto against the "language law" in cooperation with VMRO-DPMNE's actions against the law set an obstacle in Government's efforts to stabilize interethnic relations with F.Y.R.O.M's Albanians. It is assessed that Ivanov works intensively by setting obstacles to topple Zaev's Government in favor of opposition VMRO-DPMNE.



GREECE: January 30th, the U.S. Ambassador in Athens Geoffrey Pyatt said he is optimistic about the outcome of the latest efforts to resolve the F.Y.R.O.M's name issue, in an interview to the broadcaster channel "Skai". *"We support Matthew Nimetz's and the UN's efforts. I'm optimistic. The U.S we'll do everything it can to support the mediator's efforts in the days and weeks ahead,"* Pyatt said. Referring to the Western Balkans in general, the Ambassador claimed that *"it is in their interests to join NATO and the EU."* Furthermore Pyatt expressed his concerns over an "accident" in the Aegean Sea between Greece and Turkey especially after latest tension in Imia islets; *"Our concern, my worry is about an accident,"* said the Ambassador adding *"as long as you have these lethal complicated military systems operating in close proximity with each other there is always the risk of a terrible accident that obviously would have major implications for the relationship. So we strongly support the efforts that the Greek Government has made following up Erdogan visit to reopen and intensify a dialogue on military confidence building, channels of communication."* Finally Pyatt expressed the U.S dissatisfaction regarding the 2 days leave received the prisoner for terrorism Dimitris Koufontinas; *"We considered that the leave given to Mr Koufontinas was deeply*

offensive to the memory of the victims," Ambassador said. (www.skai.gr)

- February 1st, a chief advisor to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has issued a direct threat to Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, his Ministers and other Greek officials not to set foot on the islets of Imia whose sovereignty Ankara disputes. In comments on Turkish television, referring to Imia over which Greece and Turkey came close to war in 1996, Yigit Bulut said that Athens will *"feel the anger of Turkey, worse than that in Afrin,"* referring to the Kurdish-controlled enclave in Syria where Turkish troops have engaged. *"We will break the arms and legs of any officers, of the Prime Minister or of any Minister who dares to step onto Imia in the Aegean,"* Bulut said, using unusually strong language. His comments came amid massive violation of Greek air space in the Aegean by Turkish fighter jets and the escalation of rhetoric by Turkish officials over issues relating to territory in the Aegean. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- February 1st, Greece will soon submit draft proposals to resolve its name dispute with F.Y.R.O.M foreign minister Nikos Kotzias said, adding that a settlement could be reached in the coming months. *"In life, Alexander the Great ... proved we should cut Gordian knots. At some point we should finish with such issues,"* Foreign Minister told Reuters in an interview. The two countries have agreed to step up negotiations this year to resolve the dispute, which has frustrated the ambitions of Greece's small northern neighbor to join NATO and the European Union. Greece is a member of both. Greece objects to the former Yugoslav republic's use of the name "Macedonia", arguing that it, along with contentious articles in its Constitution, could

imply territorial claims over its own northern region of the same name. Asked what would constitute progress for Athens if the dispute with Skopje was not settled by June, he said: *“It will be settled.”* Kotzias said there was a new momentum to settle the dispute since a more moderate Government was elected in F.Y.R.O.M last year and following three years of trust-building efforts. *“We want to solve it. It’s in our national interest and in the interests of the region, for stability, security and economic growth,”* Kotzias said. He also revealed Athens is working on a draft which could form the basis of discussion. *“It won’t be a Greek text containing only our views, nor a done deal-compromise. It will be a text which we consider could be the basis upon which we could start to cooperate,”* he said. In his view this draft could be ready in February 2018. The most profound difference between the two sides was over references in F.Y.R.O.M’s national constitution, Kotzias said. Greece perceives them as implying territorial claims and says they must be changed. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political and security stability so far. Diplomatic initiatives for resolving the “name” dispute with F.Y.R.O.M may cause political instability due to the different political stance among the two coalition partners. Coalition partner Panos Kammenos’ stance is a key factor for future political upheavals. Parliamentary parties assess political cost of their stance in the issue. The Government is accused of “secret diplomacy and negotiations” and consensus is difficult to be reached. The massive participation of Greek people in two protests against the use of term “Macedonia” sent a strong message to political parties that it cannot be ignored. Turkey keeps on

“low level” tension in the Aegean Sea (violation of F.I.R and/or territorial sea by fighter jets and navy or coast guard vessels respectively). However it strengthens its rhetoric over sovereignty of several Greek islands and islets in the Aegean Sea.



KOSOVO: January 29th, Kosovo Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj claimed the disputable agreement on border demarcation cannot be further negotiated with his Montenegro counterpart Dusko Markovic, who is expected to visit Pristina on February 6th, 2018. Haradinaj commenting on the visit of his Montenegro counterpart Markovic said that the meeting will focus on bilateral relations between Kosovo and Montenegro aiming at implementing a protocol of cooperation. Haradinaj also commented on the ratification of the pending border agreement with Montenegro, stating that no room is left to discuss this issue with the officials of Podgorica. *“When it comes to demarcation the draft law has been proceeded to Parliament, and there is no space to discuss this issue between the two Prime Ministers,”* Haradinaj said. Commenting on the statement of his deputy Fatmir Limaj that a creative solution is needed for ratification of this disputable agreement, Haradinaj said that he welcomes any proposal which might offer a solution to this issue. *“I welcome every contribution towards a solution. We are interested in a solution but for the time being no concrete solution is offered,”* said Haradinaj. While Montenegro’s Parliament has ratified the agreement on border delineation with Kosovo reached in 2015, Kosovo Parliament has failed to ratify it after opposition and ruling coalition partners claimed that the deal would deprive Kosovo of 8,000 hectares of land. Prime Minister

Haradinaj has proceeded the Agreement to Parliament for ratification but he said that his party – the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës – AAK), will vote against its ratification. Haradinaj also was one of the biggest opponents of this deal while he was in opposition. Ratification of the border deal with Montenegro is one of the two remaining criteria for Kosovo to get visa liberalization with the EU Schengen area. The other criterion is delivering concrete results in fighting organized crime and corruption. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 30th, Kosovo Deputy Prime Minister, Enver Hoxhaj, reporting on Tuesday at the Assembly's Committee on Foreign Affairs, said that Kosovo should submit its Council of Europe (CoE) bid in 2018, noting that full membership of Kosovo will take two to three years. Answering MPs questions on Kosovo's plans to apply for the CoE membership, Hoxhaj explained the importance and benefits of Kosovo if becomes member of it. He said that Kosovo can become full-fledged member of the CoE considering favorable circumstances within this organization. He mentioned chairmanship of the council of ministers, which in the next two years will be headed by friendly countries of Kosovo, such as Finland, Denmark, France, and Croatia. Hoxhaj also assured MPs that Kosovo over the last years have made all necessary preparations to submit a solid application for CoE membership. He mentioned the fact that Russia has been suspended by this organization, which will help Kosovo to submit its bid. (www.kosovapress, www.gazetaexpress.com)

- January 31st, The US Ambassador to Kosovo, Greg Delawie, keeps opposing the initiative of the

ruling MPs to abrogate the Law on Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecution Office. Delawie in a Tweet on Wednesday claimed that also Kosovo's citizens do not support the initiative to undo the war crimes court. "*Kosovo's people don't support the initiative to undo the Special Court. I applaud politicians and others who are speaking out publicly on behalf of Kosovo citizens and, though it is difficult, what is right for Kosovo's future,*" Delawie wrote. The US Ambassador and other international officials warned Kosovo authorities of serious consequences if they continue efforts to undo the war crimes court. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration moving in the opposite direction towards the EU and NATO integration. Kosovo political elite set obstacles in significant issues provoking reactions from international community such as non ratification of the Kosovo – Montenegro demarcation agreement, adoption of the law on Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecution Office, etc. International presence guarantees security, law and order in the state so far. Kosovo which is not a UN member is quite far from the Euro-Atlantic path due to structural and institutional problems.



MOLDOVA: January 31st, the Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MFAEI) issued a statement on the recent exercises conducted by the Operative Group of Russian Troops (OGRT) in the Transnistrian region. According to press

releases of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, OGRT started military exercises including among other things, the objectives of “counteracting terrorism and training the military to act under conditions of conventional weapons of mass destruction by a conventional enemy.” In this regard, the MFAEI reiterates its annoyance and indignation at the provocative behavior of the Russian troops illegally deployed in the Transnistrian region which, despite protests repeatedly expressed by the Moldovan authorities, continue to carry out military activities with dubious goals. Concern of Moldovan authorities in this regard is also corroborated by the fact that in the exercises carried out by OGRT forces of the secessionist regime in Tiraspol are also involved. Strongly condemning such military activities, which can only be perceived as a direct and brutal threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, MFAEI reminds again the Russian Federation's commitment to withdraw its troops from the territory of the Republic of Moldova, in particular, to that set out in the Agreement on the “Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Armed Conflict in the Dniester Region of the Republic of Moldova”, signed in Moscow on July 21st, 1992. In the same context, the MFAEI reiterates the Moldovan authorities' approach to the need for unconditional withdrawal of Russian military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova and the beginning of discussions on the transformation of the current peacekeeping operation into a multinational civilian mission with international mandate. (www.mfa.gov.md, www.moldova.org)

- February 1st, the President of Moldova, Igor Dodon, has called on the Security Council to investigate the recent announcements of six village councils supporting reunion with

Romania. In a declaration, Dodon condemned the actions of the local officials that adopted the statements “against the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova”. Dodon stated that he “uses all possibilities of internal and international law, in order to ensure the national security of the Republic of Moldova”. One of the signatories of these declarations, Feștelița's mayor Nicolae Tudoreanu, accused Dodon of double standards on condemning separatism “What about awarding orders to the separatists from Comrat and Tiraspol, isn't that an attack at the independence of the Republic of Moldova? I expressed some thoughts that my ancestors had dreamt and I am sure President Dodon's ancestors too. Simply, the money he has obliges him to tell something else,” said Tudoreanu. Everyone who feels Romanian has the moral right to sign these declarations that are signed from the soul and does not have a juridical base”, said Petru Frunze, Mayor of Puhoi. “Dodon is not our President. He is an illegally elected President and he makes our state, the Republic of Moldova to become a captured state, dependent on Russia”, stated Marcel Snegur, the Mayor of Parcovă. Anatol Șalaru leader of the pro-romanian National Unity Party (Partidul Unității Naționale – PUN) commended Dodon “Dodon is not afraid of the referendums organized in Gagauzia, he is not afraid of the military exercises of the Operative Group of Russian Troops (OGRT) in Transnistria, but [he is afraid] only of the Union. He never requested the punishment of those who shot us in 1992, but he is ready to imprison the unionists”, wrote the ex-Minister of Defense in a Facebook post. (www.moldova.org)

- February 2nd, Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica

Moldova – PSRM) extended for two more months (April 1st, 2018) its campaign for collecting signatures to change Moldova’s political system towards a presidential republic due to its failure to collect so far the number of socialists expected at the start of the campaign. Social Democrat MP Vlad Batrancea said that less than 800,000 signatures were collected when the meeting of the PSRM Political Executive Committee was held. *“We have not been able to collect the number of signatures we have proposed so far. Just yesterday we had a meeting of the Political Executive Committee where the data on collecting signatures was presented and they were under 800,000. That’s why we decided that this campaign would be extended until April 1st, 2018 in order to collect over one million signatures in support of the presidential republic,”* stated Batrancea. In November 2017 PSRM leader Zinaida Greceanii stated that the party he was leading had planned to collect over one million signatures by February 2nd, 2018 in a campaign launched in October 2017 for the collection of signatures for the change to a presidential republic. (www.deschide.md)

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

30th, Montenegro and Serbia can be ready for the European Union by 2025, said the President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani in an interview with the European Western Balkans (EWB). *“The Western Balkans have a clear and credible European perspective and can count on the European Parliament to support them in this process, but the ball is in their court. Significant progress is needed in areas such as rule of law, justice and fundamental rights in both Montenegro and Serbia and I think that both can be ready by 2025 – where there is a will, there is a way,”* Tajani said. (www.europeanwesternbalkans.com , www.cdm.me)

- February 1st, the Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (Социјалистичканародна партија Црне Горе – SNP) leader Vladimir Jokovic claimed that it was almost certain that the opposition would not have a common candidate in the upcoming presidential election scheduled for April 15th, 2018. According to him, none of the opposition candidates have the chance to beat the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (Демократска партија социјалиста Црне Горе – DPS) candidate in the first round. *“It is now certain that the opposition will not have a common candidate. Everyone will go their own way. SNP decision making bodies will decide on the way of running in the elections. I do not think that any of the opposition candidates have a chance to beat a DPS candidate in the first round. Eventually, there is a chance in the second round,”* Jokovic said. Explaining this position, the SNP leader said that an opposition candidate could have a chance in the second round only if he/she would be supported by entire opposition. (www.cdm.me)

- February 2nd, at the session of Defense and Security Council chaired by the President of Montenegro Filip Vujanovic and Council members Ivan Brajovic and Prime Minister Dusko Markovic, it was decided the participation of members of the Armed Forces of Montenegro (VCG) in international exercises in 2018 following an assessment of their importance for further development of abilities and experience of VCG. *“It was noted that in these international military exercises, the efficiency and confidence are developed among the members of NATO, partner countries and the countries of the region,”* Vujanovic’s office stated. The Council established a draft decision on sending members of the Armed Forces of Montenegro to the international Resolute Support mission to Afghanistan. According to it, up to 40 members of VCG will participate in it with the possibility of rotation. Apart from that the Council established a draft decision on the participation of VCG members in the KFOR (Kosovo Force) mission in Kosovo with the involvement of two staff officers, one of which will be deployed at the Mission Command in Pristina, and the other one in the Regional Command of the Mission in Skopje. Draft decisions will be submitted to the Parliament of Montenegro for approval. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Presidential elections have been called for April 15th, 2018. One could not exclude tension during pre-electoral campaign of the potential candidates. Major reforms should be implemented in order country to come closer to the EU. Montenegro intensifies its presence in NATO by strengthening its participation in military exercises and peacekeeping missions. However

decision of joining KFOR may cause tension with neighboring Serbia.



ROMANIA: January 29th,

Romania’s new Government, led by former MEP Viorica Dancila, got the Parliament’s confidence vote and was sworn in the evening. Viorica Dancila, a member of the Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat – PSD), loyal to party leader Liviu Dragnea, officially becomes Romania’s first woman Prime Minister. A total of 282 senators and deputies voted for the new Government while 136 MPs voted against. The minimum number of votes for the cabinet to pass was 233. PSD and junior partner Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților – ALDE) have 243 MPs, but the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România – UDMR) also voted for the Government. PSD leader Liviu Dragnea, the Chamber of Deputies Speaker, said that, in 2016, the PSD - ALDE coalition started implementing the most ambitious governing program Romania has seen in the last 27 years, but its opponents tried to prevent this. He described Viorica Dancila as a *“pleasant and reasonable women, who has breathed western air and has distanced herself from the Romanian way of doing politics, often dominated by small stakes and personal interests.”* Viorica Dancila addressed the Parliament saying that she will govern *“proudly and with respect for the Romanians.”* She added that no new taxes will be introduced as long as she is Prime Minister and that the wages and pensions will continue to grow. (www.romania-insider.com, www.news.ro)

- January 30th, the European Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Cretu has confirmed that in Brussels it is considered that the allocation of funds to be conditioned on observing the rule of law by the beneficiary countries. *“There is talk now, not necessarily about Romania, to condition the allocation of European funds on observing the rule of law. It may be enforced after 2020. Currently, there is no legal provision to condition the allocation of European funds. In a German newspaper I was criticized for approving a project for expanding the subway in Warsaw, given the (political) skidding in Poland. If Poland goes to the Court of Justice of the European Union, it will win,”* Cretu said. The European Commissioner stressed that if Romania does not *“Make major efforts,”* it risks losing important European funds this year. Corina Cretu met Prime Minister Viorica Dancila at Victoria Palace. *“From our point of view, of the European Commission, we will have a good relationship and permanent dialogue. (...) Romania has made progress, especially in the last months, after the authorities for the management and control of European funds have been accredited. In fact, from August up to now, an absorption rate of one billion Euros has been reached, as you know, from scratch. Previous steps have been recovered, but even so, the rhythm must not be lowered, on the contrary,”* Cretu said at the end of the meeting with the Prime Minister Dancila. The European Commissioner mentioned that Romania has an allocation of twenty billion Euros from the funds she coordinates. Cretu claimed she was never asked in Brussels about the justice issues in Romania, but points out that the exchange of letters between the European Commission and Bucharest is a *“practice”* to *“express some concerns.”* *“Personally, I was not at all questioned about the justice issues in Romania,*

nor was the Foreign Ministry. I am regarded as Commissioner for Regional Policy. Of course, it’s obvious that a political battle is taking place in Romania and an additional effort should be made to continue the dialogue. I believe it’s not fair to associate Romania with Poland at this time, in terms of political skidding,” Cretu said. She also expressed confidence that the new PM Viorica Dancila *“will have the ambition to prove she can deal with all the new responsibilities, given that she has the experience of the eight years in the European Parliament.”* (www.romaniajournal.com)



Meeting of the Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dancila with the EU Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Cretu

(Photo source: www.gov.ro)

January 31st, President Klaus Iohannis met in Brussels the European Commissioner Jean-Claude Juncker and the President of the European Council Donald Tusk. Discussions focused on the changes to the justice laws and the fight against corruption in Romania. In a joint press conference Juncker said Romania has made remarkable progress related to the rule of law, and the European Commission (EC) will not accept any steps back on this matter. He also warned that if the justice laws in Romania remain as voted by the Parliament, the talks on the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) and accession to Schengen Zone *“will be put in other terms.”*

However, he also said that Romania belongs in the Schengen area, and the Commission “*will not stop until the CVM is abolished.*” Juncker rejected claims of the leaders of the ruling coalition in Romania, Liviu Dragnea and Calin Popescu Tariceanu that he has been misinformed about the laws of justice in Romania claiming he is well informed about the decisions related to the rule of law. In his turn, Romanian President Iohannis said that “*the independence of justice is intangible,*” and that he will do everything a President can do “*to keep things this way. I think we have a major problem with the laws of justice and the codes. But we have to solve this problem in Romania. The solution is in our hands and that is why I insisted on having legal solutions that satisfy the needs of the system back home and the generally valid criteria, the European values. I am optimistic about the final course, now we are in an intermediate phase.*” (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The new Government got confidence vote in the Parliament and started implementing its governing project. However it seems that an EU – Romania crisis has broken out due to the Justice Laws adopted last year by the Parliament. Not only the EU but also opposition and civic society of Romania raise questions over justice independence. The EU officials keep sending determined messages to Romanian ruling politicians threatening to cut funding and block certain actions like entrance of the country to the Schengen Zone. However Romania as member of the EU and NATO enjoys security and stability.



SERBIA: February 1st, the Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said from Slovenia that the President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani said “*unequivocally*” that “*Serbia will not have to recognize Kosovo in order to join the EU.*” “*What we heard in terms of a legally binding agreement [with Pristina] is nothing new, we’ve heard it before, President Vucic also spoke about this, [EU Integration] Minister Joksimovic also spoke about this... I think it has been said unequivocally by the European Parliament President Tajani, that Serbia will not have to recognize Kosovo’s independence in order to join the EU. It seems to me that this is a clear and unequivocal message. Normalization with Pristina and finding a long-term sustainable relationship with Pristina is our obligation as the politicians who lead Serbia,*” Brnabic said. The Prime Minister underlined that she was glad to be at the helm of the Serbian Government, and to be living in a country whose President is “*a brave enough and a responsible enough politician to want to raise this issue and try to solve it, so as not to leave it to future generations.*” According to her, “*The easiest thing to do would be to say that this is a frozen conflict, and hand the hot potato over to someone else.*” According to Tanjug’s report from Slovenia, Brnabic also “*underlined that the Brussels agreement (between Belgrade and Pristina) was signed almost five years ago - and Belgrade has fulfilled most of its part, while Prishtina did nothing,*” referring to the Community of Serb Municipalities. (www.b92.net, www.tanjug.rs)

- February 1st, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said the decision of the Spanish Government to exclude Kosovo from the EU accession talks is reasonable. The Belgrade-based

daily “Vecernje Novosti” writes Spain will agree to Kosovo in the EU but only as a region of Serbia. According to the newspaper Spain supports the idea that Kosovo can become a part of the Union only as a separate administration within Serbia. In this sense, Spain has sent to top EU officials not only one written objection, as mentioned over the previous days, but several protest documents. “Spain’s position on the non-recognition of the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo is based on the defense of the principles of the territorial integrity of states, respect for international law, and the rule of law,” the Public Relations Office of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs told the Belgrade newspaper. Earlier this week, Albanian language media in Pristina reported that Spain had sent a non-paper to Brussels with the goal of blocking any mention of Kosovo as a separate state in EU’s upcoming enlargement strategy. (www.b92.net, www.tanjug.rs, www.novosti.rs)

- February 2nd, People’s Party (Народна странка, HC – NS) leader Vuk Jeremic claimed President Aleksandar Vucic is not capable of reaching a favorable compromise deal on Kosovo and Metohija. According to him “Vucic is preparing to allow Pristina to get a chair in the UN, at the request of foreigners, and in return he will get only a one-day visit to German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Achieving a compromise solution about Kosovo and Metohija is a very complicated situation, and it is not enough to just talk to the Albanians and decide to give up everything they are demanding. Vucic’s negotiation model with the Albanians is giving them what they demand in order to ask from foreigners not to touch him when he, for example, turns off the media light in Serbia.” Jeremic added “has come to his end, and must end” because foreigners demand from Vucic

a UN chair for Kosovo “and he is getting ready to hand that over, by preparing the public for such an outcome through the media.” (www.b92.net, www.beta.rs)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Relative political stability. Security situation is stable. It seems that next two years (2018 – 2019) will be a key period for a solution in Kosovo case. The EU is going to strengthen its pressure for a mutual accepted solution as a precondition for both countries to enter the EU. It is estimated that Vucic – Thaci work intensively in a mutual agreement which is backed by certain EU states. The Kosovo issue creates a fragile balance on permanent basis.



SLOVENIA: January 30th,

Slovenian Armed Forces face a major problem with manning which affects in their operational capabilities. While the institutional documents foresee a permanent force during peacetime of 7,600 people the Armed Forces have not reached it since 2012. Army manning is reducing steadily since 2012 while one should take into consideration that more people leave military every year. For example, last year only 130 people were newly recruited in the Army, while 200 to 300 people retired. Currently, the Slovenian Armed Forces consist of 6,790 people, which are about 800 people less than the required personnel according to the strategic documents. Moreover Slovenian people and especially young citizens are reluctant to join the Army since it does not provide a satisfactory package of salary and other benefits. Under these circumstances it looks difficult for the Armed Forces to find a way to fill in the personnel gap. Under this prism the

Armed Forces General Staff, proposed to the political leadership some measures aiming at improving military personnel life and attracting more people to join the Army. These proposals includes financial improvements and other social care measures such as tax deductions, cheaper kindergarten, and the employment of soldiers after the age of 45 in the state administration at appropriate workplaces. Furthermore the General Staff seriously considers the possibility of recruiting contract reservists as a flexible way of improving manning. The army has currently 949 contract reservists for crisis situations, which receive a monthly compensation of 120 Euros. However migrant crisis in Slovenia obliged the Slovenian Army to call for service 300 contract reservists in peace which has never happened in the past. The General Staff considers the possibility of recalling more reservists in order to fill in its personnel needs taking into consideration that the state has accepted the obligation to establish two medium-sized battalion groups by 2025. By activating the contractual reservists the Armed Forces will be able to reach the approved manning allowing them to implement their operational tasks. (www.vecer.com)

- February 1st, Slovenian fishermen have started receiving fines from Croatian Police as a countermeasure against Slovenian Police fines against Croatian fishermen. Fisherman Silvano Radin claimed that he has received six fines in one day each totaling almost 2,000 Euros. His company was fined for another 1,330 Euros and he as the company's boss got another 660 Euros fine, or almost 14,000 Euros in total. Radin said that he has been fined for having violated Croatia's border control and Schengen border legislation. In the notice coming with one of the

fines fisherman was accused of violating Croatia's territorial sea. However the Slovenian Prime Minister Miro Cerar assured that Slovenian fishermen will not feel any consequences of the fines issued by Croatia over the crossing of the central border in the Piran Bay. "Our fishermen must not feel any financial and other burdens in this case," Cerar said. "With the arbitration law, we have taken care of all the legal safety of our fishermen as well. In the event that there is any disruption in their work, that is, when they are fishing or if some sentences are imposed on the Croatian side, they will be provided with all legal assistance and funds on the side of our country, in order to cover their costs and everything that would burden them," Cerar said. "I expect that Croatia will recognize that in this case it violates international and European law and in this way avoids the only possible approach to finally resolve this matter," said the Slovenian Prime Minister. (www.sta.si, www.total-slovenian-news.com)

- February 1st, the Prime Minister's of Slovenia and Serbia Miro Cerar and Ana Brnabic led in the fourth meeting, of the Governments of Slovenia and Serbia. Ministers of both countries signed an agreement on employment of citizens of Serbia in Slovenia, a memorandum on security and health and a letter of intention for further cooperation in the field of film and audiovisual sector. At the joint press conference, Cerar highlighted excellent political, economic, cultural and other relations between the two countries. Economic exchanges and investments are increasing steadily. Regarding the succession to the former common state of Yugoslavia, Cerar stressed the agreement on the work of the mixed Commission, while two other subgroups for cultural heritage and archives will be established. Cerar also said that Serbia

will be a partner at this year's MOS business fair in Celje, and Brnabic underlined the successful cooperation of both countries in third markets mentioning the tourist campaign in Iran under the slogan "Enjoy Serbia, feel Slovenia." Cerar promised a further Slovenian support for Serbia's approach towards the Euro-Atlantic integration. Serbian Prime Minister acknowledged that Serbia is learning from Slovenia mentioning for example, procedure in opening chapters in the negotiations for the EU membership. Regarding relations with Kosovo, she emphasized that Belgrade and Ljubljana have different views, since the latter recognized Kosovo as an independent state. She estimated that Belgrade would join the EU without recognizing Kosovo. In Belgrade, they want Pristina to begin implementing the Brussels agreement signed five years ago, which envisages among other the establishment of a union of Serbian municipalities in Kosovo. The murder of prominent Serbian politician Oliver Ivanovic in Kosovo has complicated things, especially since Serbian prosecutors in the investigation cannot contribute in the investigations. Cerar supported the continuation of the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade claiming *"The EU must also play an active role, since dialogue leads to the normalization of relations in the wider region."* The Slovenian Prime Minister spoke about the arbitration award and the dispute with Croatia reiterating that Slovenia will consistently insist on respecting and enforcing arbitrage; *"Croatia will have to recognize that by refusing arbitration it violates international and European law,"* Cerar said. Barnabic stressed *"We should not have an opinion on everything. This is a question among the EU members. But Serbia is committed to respect international law otherwise we will destroy the standards we live in. The dispute and*

the non-recognition of arbitration award complicate the issue border in the Western Balkans. You know that if we do not agree on a bilateral basis, only international arbitration remains. If this is in question for an EU member state, then it would be difficult for the EU itself to invoke international arbitration to us. I want a rapid solution for this dispute; a solution which may become a model for solving problems of other countries in the region." (www.vecer.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Tension with Croatia remains in political level exclusively. Although there are political voices calling for dialogue Slovenia looks fully determined to implement the arbitration award acting unilaterally. The "war" of fines against fishermen of both countries furthermore deteriorates relations between them. Security situation is closely monitored.



TURKEY: January 29th – February 4th, Turkish Operation "OLIVE BRANCH" against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) forces in Syria's Afrin is continued aim at accomplishing its objectives. However rising Turkish military casualties raises concerns over operation's effectiveness. It should be noticed that information regarding the current outcome of military operations are not so reliable and clear due to propaganda reasons from both sides. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan claimed that Turkish troops are getting closer to Afrin town center while the operation entered in its third week. Speaking at a congress of the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi - AKP) in the eastern province of Bitlis, Erdogan said *"We are advancing into*

Afrin. We are close.” On the other hand PYD/YPG [Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party/People’s protection Units] claims that Turkish offensive operations are being failed due to strong Kurdish forces fight. Meanwhile, Syrian opposition sources reported that Faylaq al-Sham, the Free Idlib Army and the Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement had sent hundreds of their fighters to Turkey in order to participate in the ongoing Turkish attack on the Afrin area. Redeployment of these forces from Idlib to Afrin area confirms that the Turkish Army is planning to expand its operations in Afrin. Moreover, it may indicate that these armed groups are no longer willing to fight the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) in Idlib. Kurdish forces in Syria have called on the United States to do more to stop Turkey's assault on Afrin. *“How can they stand by and watch?”* Aldar Khalil, a senior Kurdish politician, asked of the US-led coalition adding *“They should meet their obligations towards this force that joined them [in the fight against terrorism]. We consider their unclear and indecisive positions as a source of concern.”* However Turkey looks absolutely frustrated and furious with the U.S stance. The ongoing American military support for PYD/YPG jeopardizes Turkey's security. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavusoglu said that *“The U.S. and Turkey are in a delicate period because Ankara and Washington hold different views on important issues, including PYD/YPG terrorists in Syria and the presence of the FETÖ terror group in the U.S.”* While Cavusoglu highlighted the importance of Turkish-American cooperation for bilateral relations and the future of the region, said Ankara continues high-level contacts with Washington and believes it is important to keep communication channels open. In the meantime, Erdogan has raised the stakes even higher stating that Turkey will clear not just Afrin, but also the

city of Manbij, just west of the Euphrates River, and all the land held by the YPG along Turkey’s long border with Syria to the east of the Euphrates. According to military sources the third phase of the operation is slated to target Manbij, a U.S controlled region. Obviously, this expanded scope would raise the possibility of direct confrontation with the U.S forces positioned in and around the Manbij region for the training of and support to the YPG. Ankara’s hope will be to convince the US to remove its troops from Manbij, which would also signal the weakening commitment to the YPG. General Joseph Votel, commander of the U.S. Central Command, which coordinates anti-DAESH operations in Iraq and Syria, said the U.S. will not withdraw troops from Syria's YPG-held town of Manbij sending a clear message to Turkey and raising concerns over a possible confrontation between the two countries. Turkey participated in the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in the Russian Black Sea city of Sochi claiming that it expects all parties at conflict in Syria to fulfill their responsibilities in finding a credible political settlement. *“The most important outcome of the Congress was the call for the establishment of a Constitutional Committee and the selection of a pool of 150 candidates for this committee. The Turkish delegation, which was given the mandate to represent opposition groups that didn't attend the Congress, submitted a list of 50 candidates in consultation with the opposition,”* a Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement said. The Syrian National Dialogue Congress, backed by Turkey, Russia and Iran, aims to bring all the warring parties in the Syrian conflict, excluding terror groups, to the table to facilitate the U.N.-sponsored peace talks in Geneva. (www.aa.com.tr, www.dailysabah.com, www.dw.com, www.hurriyetdailynews.com)

- February 3rd, Kemal Kılıçdaroglu was re-elected as the chairman of main opposition Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP) at the party's 36th general congress this weekend ahead of three crucial elections in 2019. Kılıçdaroglu, who has led the party since 2010, was the front-runner for party chairmanship in the congress. A total of 790 delegates voted for Kılıçdaroglu, while the other candidate, Yalova Deputy Muharrem Ince, received 447 votes. Some 1253 delegates out of 1266 cast their votes. Ince had also run for chairmanship against Kılıçdaroglu in the party's 2014 congress, in which 740 delegates voted for Kılıçdaroglu and 415 for Ince. Former Istanbul Bar Association Head Umit Kocasakal and Omer Faruk Eminagaoglu, former Head of the Judges and Prosecutors Association, have also announced their candidacies for the party chairmanship, but they could not collect the required number of signatures. Kılıçdaroglu has been criticized from his party members as he has lost the national vote eight times in elections and referendums since taking office in 2010, after the resignation of former Chairman Deniz Baykal. (www.dailysabah.com)



Re-elected President of CHP Kemal Kılıçdaroglu
(Photo source: www.chp.org.tr)

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. The new extension of the country's state of emergency maintains or even strengthens the abnormality of current political life. The country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of persecution of citizens. In southeastern region of the country there is an ongoing armed conflict between the state's security forces and Kurd guerillas. Turkey has engaged in a military operation against Kurds in Syrian borders invading in fact in Syrian territory with unknown repercussions for the state. It seems that Turkish Armed Forces face strong defense reaction from the Kurdish Forces which may lead in a long term military campaign. Moreover the U.S – Turkey relations are reaching a critical point which may turn into a direct confrontation; a scenario which is not very possible.

www.hermesresearch.eu

email: info@hermesresearch.eu

Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas

NOTE

- Stable situation. No security risk
- Rather stable situation. Security risk is monitored
- Major concerns over stability and security. significant security risk in specific regions
- Imminent major incidents regarding stability and security. High security risk

■ Evolving or ongoing crisis or violent/armed
conflict