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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: October 31st, execution of Kostandinos Katsifas, member of the Greek minority in Albania and also a Greek citizen who fired against the Police on October 28th, 2018 in Bularat, by the Albanian Police Special Forces has created tension between the two countries. The Greek Foreign Ministry released an announcement claiming that the loss of life is unacceptable. The Prime Minister Edi Rama reacted in the announcement through social media by writing *“Dear neighbors, instead of considering unacceptable the death of a lunatic who fired live bullets against our Police, which only did its job, you should join us and thank God that no innocent life was taken today by the craziness of extremism.”* The Albanian Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs summoned the Greek Ambassador in Tirana, Eleni Surani twice. The first time, on October 30th, 2018 the Ministry reiterated the appeals for maturity, making sure that Albania is a safe place for every citizen, including those of Greek nationality. On October 31st, 2018 the Ambassador was summoned again in the Ministry which asked from the Greek official to notify a distancing of the Greek authorities from these events and condemn the serious acts that damage the friendly relations between both countries. It also emphasized the need to guarantee the life and property of Albanian citizens who live in Greece. According to an announcement of the Albanian Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs *“The Greek Ambassador to Albania, Eleni Sourani, was summoned at the Albanian Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs regarding the recent events in Greece, such as a bomb alarm at the Albanian embassy, the burning of Albanian businesses, the protests in front of the Albanian consulate and the burning of Albania’s national flag.”* The Albanian

President Ilir Meta commending the incident said this was an isolated incident that should not influence the friendship between Greece and Albania. *“The Greek minority in Albania and the Albanian immigrants in Greece will continue to be a solid bridge of this relation,”* Meta said. (www.top-channel.tv)

- November 1st, Albania and Kosovo are ready to decide on a joint customs point, while the Albanian port of Durrës will become a joint customs for all goods and products entering from Kosovo the Prime Minister Edi Rama said. *“First of all, we do not talk about Albania and Kosovo without customs, but we talk about a joint custom service for the two countries.”* Rama said. He claimed that Albania is ready to implement the agreement and the final deal will be presented in a joint governmental meeting in late November. According to Rama the joint customs point is feasible and facilitates common trade between the two countries. *“We have an open discussion with Serbia and Macedonia [F.Y.R.O.M] and other countries in the field of economic and trade cooperation,”* Rama said adding the EU states enjoy free trade and movement; *“This is what we want to do here,”* the Prime Minister stated. Rama underlined the importance of construction of the Kukes airport considering it as a strategic project not only for Albania, but for Kosovo as well. He claimed that works will start soon so the airport becomes operational in the autumn 2019. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

- November 3rd, the Albanian President Ilir Meta has not decreed the new Interior Minister of Albania Sander Lleshi, announcing that he does not have his trust in handing over to him the post of Minister. According to the Constitution, Meta has a period of seven days to sign the appointment

of the new Minister. “Sander Lleshi does not have the President’s trust for fulfilling his duties as the Minister of Interior Affairs,” the President announced. However, according to the Constitution the President does not actually have the power to block the appointment of a Minister. Former President Bujar Nishani, who publicly appeared against the nomination of former Interior Minister Fatmir Xhafaj last year, acknowledged that he had no power to reject it. Lleshi was nominated by the Prime Minister Edi Rama as the first candidate to take the place of Fatmir Xhafaj, who had resigned a few days ago. (www.albaniandailynews.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Resignation of Interior Minister Xhafaj brought a governmental and political crisis in Albania. Although there are a lot who claim that his resignation will release the Government from a burden due to Xhafaj’s links with organized crime, it is assessed that his resignation will be followed by new actions and incidents against Rama’ Government causing rapid political developments. The Albanian President’s refusal to decree the new Interior Minister adds a new chapter in the crisis. The main conclusion is that corruption and organized crime remains the most significant state’s problem undermining its strategic goal of opening accession negotiations with the EU next year. The EU closely monitors progress of reforms especially in justice sector. Opposition launches strong accusations against the Government and Edi Rama for having close relations with organized crime raising questions over the power of “Albanian mafia” in the country and its influence in state’s politics. Albania monitors Kosovo – Serbia negotiations and definitely has a role as a “mother nation”. It

is estimated that Albania will fully comply with the EU and U.S “line” for territorial exchanges or border changes between Serbia and Kosovo if it is necessary for a mutual accepted solution. Albania maintains its leading role in the Albanian world providing guarantees and support to Albanian population in the region namely Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and F.Y.R.O.M. Possible border changes may engage Albania in dangerous situations taking into consideration that it has the role of “protector” of Albanians in the region. Security situation stable without major incidents or challenges.



BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

October 29th, migrants and refugees residing in the area of Bosnia's north-western town of Velika Kladusa are still in the open, while situation in borders is disastrous. Humanitarian and sanitary conditions are appalling. Situation is no better for migrants who spend their nights at the Maljevac border crossing. Tents near the Bosnia - Croatia border crossing of Maljevac are made of cellophane and tape. There is no electricity and there are shortages of water. Huge piles of rubbish attract various animals. Migrants often eat only once in 24 hours. While the Croatian side of border remains closed, a number of migrants from the Bihac area (near Velika Kladusa) refused to be taken to one of the migrant centers where they could sleep in warm beds. Responsibility for the situation is shifted from one institution to another. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said that all the migrants were offered accommodation in one of the migrant centers which could take them in and that those who remained sleeping in the open or in tents in the Velika Kladusa area are the ones who refused to

move due to their own reasons. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- November 1st, Republika Srpska (RS) has no plans for secession from Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) but it insists on the full implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the war in Bosnia (1992-1995), said the RS entity's Government in its annual report to the UN Security Council. The report consists of two parts. The first one is the 20th report of the RS Government to the UN Security Council speaking of the recent general election in B&H and the situation in the previous period, while the second part is called Subversion of the Dayton system. In the first part, the RS Government pays special attention to the fact that every constituent people (namely Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks) should be allowed to elect its own representative in the Presidency. This fact mainly reflects to the Croatian entity which failed to elect in the recent elections of the October 7th, 2018 its own representative. On the contrary, it was elected a candidate mostly by the votes of Bosniaks and not Croats. The RS also wrote they are ready to work with all political actors in the country for a better future of all people. They said they wish to build stronger ties with the EU and US institutions and work on processing of war crimes and fight terrorism. In the Special Report of the RS Government titled "*The Subversion of the Dayton System*" they accused the strongest Bosniak nationalist party the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA) of violating the Dayton Peace Agreement which is also the Constitution of the state. According to them, SDA is attempting to create a centralized state through allegedly illegal actions by the High Representative in B&H, turning it into a dysfunctional state. Moreover the Serbian entity

reacts against the power of High Representative who can overturn any decision and impose his own. Report also accuses the US of interfering in the general election by allegedly providing more than 100 million dollars to the media in Bosnia, without any transparency, aiming at influencing the election. When it comes to the "SDA's domination," the RS Government warned that the SDA's policies after the war led Bosnia to become a safe haven for jihadists. The report was sent to the UN Security Council several days after the High Representative presented his own Progress Report which deals with the events that occurred in B&H over the past year, and which affect the stability of the country and the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. (www.ba.n1info.com)

- November 2nd, Bosnia's new Government needs to be formed as soon as possible and economic reforms should be the country's top priority, the top international official in Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H), Valentin Inzko, told US State Secretary Advisor Matthew Palmer and other US top officials. As High Representative, Inzko is charged by the international community to oversee the implementation of the peace agreement which ended the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia. "*Citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international community have big expectations from the new Government which needs to be formed as soon as possible,*" Inzko said. "*If Bosnia wants to meet its obligations toward its citizens and international partners, urgent and decisive implementation of reforms is necessary in order to achieve progress in the process of joining the EU,*" he added. He also touched upon the October 7th, 2018 general election, saying that it was unfortunate that the

pre-election campaign was focused on issues that deepen ethnic divisions. (www.baninfo.com)



Bosnia & Herzegovina High Representative

Valentin Inzko

(Photo source: www.ohr.int)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Country faces several functional and institutional problems. Consequently political fragility maintains permanent uncertainty and institutional mistrust. It is under question if the general election held on October 7th, 2018 will bring political stability in the country. It is estimated that formation of Government would be a very difficult issue. Croats do not accept the electoral results claiming that Croatian community did not elect its representative in the tripartite presidency. There is a feeling of injustice among Croat people which actually forced Croatia's Prime Minister to set the problem in his EU counterparts. Election of ultra nationalist Serb Milorad Dodik in the tripartite Presidency is a strong sign of more nationalistic rhetoric and more obstacles towards Bosnia's EU and NATO integration. Dodik is a person who does not believe in B&H viability and is expected to promote his own political agenda. Bosnia has become a field of influence's rivalry; Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Russia approach the country mainly through "investments" and/or funding ethnic or religious groups according to their

interests. Major concerns over security situation and political stability in the state.



BULGARIA: November 1st, Deputy Prime Minister Valeri Simeonov has rejected as "inappropriate" calls from three political parties to resign over the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad case, in which four people including the agency's Head face numerous criminal charges for alleged illicit dealing in certificates of Bulgarian origin, needed to apply for citizenship. The opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya – BSP), Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi - DPS), and Parliament's smallest party, Volya, made the calls because the agency is ultimately part of Simeonov's portfolio as a Deputy Head of the Government. Simeonov said that although he had a coordinatory role, he did not directly manage the agency. His statement came a few days after allegations emerged that the agency had been involved in a scheme to supply certificates of Bulgarian ancestry to nationals of F.Y.R.O.M, Ukraine, and Moldova, needed to apply for Bulgarian citizenship. Allegedly, the fees for such certificates ranged from 5,000 to 8,000 euros. (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- November 2nd, energy, transport, security and regional co-operation were among the top items on the agenda of talks in Varna hosted by Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borissov and attended by leaders from Greece, Romania and Serbia, as well as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Serbian President Aleksander Vucic said that such meetings – the quadrilateral summit in the Bulgarian Black Sea city is the fifth in this format – are of significant importance. Roads, natural gas, railways and the economy are the most important for the countries of the region,

Vucic said. Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras emphasized the importance of the summit and expressed his gratitude for the presence of Netanyahu. Tsipras praised the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, held in the first half of 2018, which he described as paving the way for the European integration of the Western Balkans. He noted that an agreement is to be signed about the construction of the Bourgas - Alexandroupolis railway line and the construction of a highway from Alexandroupolis to the border with Bulgaria. Tsipras emphasized the importance of energy security in the Balkans and expressed the hope that co-operation in this field would continue. Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dancila said that the meeting in Varna was *“A good occasion for the continuation of the dialogue between us as far as regional co-operation is concerned, starting from the common interests to ensure stability in the region. These are very important goals in the geopolitical situation.”* Netanyahu said *“We work for the good of our people by creating high-tech prerequisites to fight terrorism. In many cases, we have succeeded in preventing terrorist attacks and we have received assistance from your services in each of your countries, for which we are very grateful. Not everyone in our countries knows about this, but I want to thank you for this co-operation and express my intention to continue this general activity to save lives.”* Borissov said that the quartet and its meetings had always had one goal within the EU, to raise the level of connectivity – energy, infrastructure and digital – while he emphasized that *“Our policy has never been targeted against third parties. On the contrary, we believe that with the entry of Serbia into the EU, it will become stronger. As far as energy security is concerned, we all have accepted that diversification is essential. It is not*

by accident that we named our gas hub or gas distribution center “Balkan” because the word “Balkans” is common to all of us.” (www.sofiaglobe.com)

- November 3rd, the Bulgarian - Azerbaijani relations in the energy field are an important basis for the further development of bilateral cooperation, said Azerbaijani Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov in an interview for Focus News Agency. He said long-standing relations between Bulgaria and Azerbaijan yield concrete results, such as the agreement for Azerbaijani gas exports to Bulgaria. *“We hope the Bulgaria - Greece gas interconnection project will soon be implemented, enabling transportation of Azerbaijani gas to Bulgaria from 2020. This will open new and additional opportunities for cooperation in the field of energy and other areas,”* the Azerbaijani Minister said. Mammadyarov pointed out that direct flight Baku-Sofia as of January 2019 will strengthen the contacts between the two countries, especially in tourism. He stressed there is mutual interest and broad opportunities to expand cooperation in energy, transport, agriculture, tourism, ICT and the environment. Mammadyarov paid an official visit to Bulgaria where he met with high-ranking officials. (www.novinite.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Bulgaria maintains relative political stability although ruling coalition faces several challenges threaten its sustainability. President Radev strengthens his rhetoric and criticism against the Government (and the Prime Minister Borissov) highlighting their different political affiliation (Radev is backed by the opposition Socialists). Opposition BSP tries to push further Borisov and

his Government by strengthening its rhetoric and tabling a new motion of no confidence. However, there is little possibility of Government's collapse and early parliamentary elections. The country strengthened its efforts towards entering the Eurozone achieving a positive decision of the Eurogroup. Corruption and organized crime remain significant obstacles and should be addressed decisively. Although modernization of Armed Forces is a top priority for Bulgaria and huge armament projects are ongoing (fighter jets, armored vehicles, vessels etc) military operational capability of the state is questioned especially in the Air Force. Bulgarian Armed Forces are far from NATO standards. Security situation stable; no major threats.



CROATIA: November 3rd, the Bridge of Independent Lists' (Most Nezavisnih Lista - MOST) Secretary, Nikola Gromoja and the member of the Main Board of MOST, and Vice President of the Vukovar - Srijem County Assembly, Nizar Shoukry spoke to reporters about their party's views on migration during a press conference. They accused Croatia's leadership of being irresponsible when it comes to Croatia's participation in the Global Compact on Migration. Shourky, who is originally from Syria but has been living and working in Croatia for the past 35 years, said it was important to keep Croatia's borders secure. He also touched on his volunteer work with migrants. *"I work with these people every day and every day tens of them attempt to cross our border from Serbia illegally. Our Police are handling the enormous task of preventing illegal movement across the border. Croatia is not against migrants. We proved that in 2015, but we do want strict control of the migrants coming into the country so we know who*

they are," he said. He also suggested that Croatia should put more fences and physical barriers along Croatia's southern and eastern frontiers. Sending the army to the border would also discourage people from attempting to cross the border illegally, he said. *"Migrants have great respect for the military and they know that the Croatian Army is a highly professional force. The mere presence of the military next to our Police will send a strong message."* He added. Nikola Grmoja wants the President to explain why she is not going to Marrakesh and the Government to inform the public about what this agreement actually means for countries that support it. The US, Hungary, and Austria have announced they will not be taking part. *"I think actions of the President and the Government on this issue are irresponsible. The Government is staying quiet while the President says she'll go and then changes her mind without explaining what the problem is with the Global Compact. I don't think this is the way that responsible leaders govern. We are going to insist on the security of the Croatian people and the Croatian border,"* Grmoja said. (www.glashrvatske.hr/hr)

- November 3rd, Croatia's President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic said the country needs a consensual development strategy and resolute reforms if it wants to move forward. *"Any politician is ready to implement decisive, even unpopular reforms would contribute to Croatia's prosperity the most, even if he/she would lose the election,"* Grabar-Kitarovic said. Political parties should reach a consensus over a national strategy that would determine *"The general direction we are heading and how we see Croatia in 10, 15 or 50 years."* The strategy should define the future and competitiveness of Croatia's industry and other sectors, for example, the shipbuilding

industry, and it should tackle issues like demography, labor market, pension and health care system, and education. The average salary should be increased and this can be achieved through tax reforms, she explained. Fewer people would be leaving the country if the average salary would be about 1,000 Euros, the President claimed. Grabar-Kitarovic believes the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica - HDZ) led by Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, will support her if she decides to rerun for office. Her five-year term expires in January 2020. Although she is a HDZ member, she believes that she is behaving *“As an above-party President who has never favored any party.”* *“I was elected by over one million and one hundred thousand citizens and I am accountable to them just as to those who did not vote for me,”* she said. (www.hr.n1info.com)

- November 3rd, Croatia's President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic said that she is *“Really concerned over the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina,”* but rejected claims made by some Bosnian politicians that her country is interfering in Bosnian internal affairs. Croatia's Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and members of the European Parliament have complained to the EU officials about the results of the October 2018 election in Bosnia and the way the Bosnian Croat member of the country's tripartite Presidency was chosen. Each member of the body represents one of the three ethnic majorities – Bosniaks (Muslim Bosnians), Croats and Serbs. Croatia's leadership claims that the elected Croat member is not a true representative of the Bosnian Croats because mostly the numerically dominant Bosniaks had elected him, while most of Croats voted for someone else. However, several Bosnian officials have accused Croatia's leadership of meddling

with state's internal affairs. Grabar-Kitarovic said she *“Absolutely rejects”* such allegations and emphasized that it was Bosnia's Constitutional Court that issued the ruling and that ordered changes to be made. *“This is why we will - along with other countries that insist on the Election Law changes, including EU members and the US - insist on the establishment of a functional and legitimate Government for the benefit of all in Bosnia,”* she added. (www.hr.n1info.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Croatia follows a tough external policy with neighboring countries. Although it has territorial disputes with Slovenia and Bosnia it does not hesitate to intervene in Bosnia's internal affairs in the name of Croatian entity living there. It is more than obvious that Croatia tries to establish a leading role in Western Balkans not only as an EU and NATO member state but also as a rising “local” power. One should take into consideration that Croatia shows its military strength and capabilities quite often not only in international, but also in national level sending strong messages to neighboring countries. Although the President is a member of the ruling party, it is estimated that there is some kind of political distance between the President and Government. However, ruling coalition claims political stability. Border dispute on Piran Bay remains active and Slovenia's initiative to file a lawsuit against Croatia adds a new chapter between the two countries conflict. It is still a question how Croatia will react. Apart from that a new border conflict has emerged with Bosnia & Herzegovina regarding Peljesak Bridge. The state accelerates its efforts towards accession in Schengen zone. Croatia implements a policy of Armed Forces' modernization trying to form a

reliable and well equipped force according to NATO standards.



CYPRUS: October 31st, three warships, eight aircraft and three private vessels took part in a large-scale multinational exercise dubbed Nemesis off Cyprus. Navy and Air Force Search and Rescue units participated in various scenarios including counter-terrorism operations on oil/gas platforms, boarding operations on vessels, evacuation and rescue operations, mass rescue operations, as well as anti-pollution operations within the Cypriot FIR. Two Greek and a French Navy frigate took part in the exercise, along with one missile and four patrol boats of the Israeli navy, four Cypriot navy vessels, and two marine police patrol boats. A tanker, two anti-pollution vessels, and a support ship also participated. Five helicopters from Cyprus, France, and United Kingdom, as well as three aircrafts (1 Hellenic C-130, 1 P-8 of USA and 1 of the Forestry Department) from Greece, the US, and Cyprus, were also used. Additionally, the 31st Airborne Search and Rescue Operations Squadron of the Hellenic Air Force, the Underwater Demolition Team of the of the Navy Command of the National Guard, the paramedic teams of the Ministry of Health, the Disaster Response Special Unit (D.R.S.U.), as well as the Search and Rescue RHIB “NIREAS” with rescuers of Civil Defense participated with special tasks. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- November 1st, the vessel leased by ExxonMobil to drill for gas off the coast of Cyprus is en route to the island. The Stena IceMax drillship, flying a United Kingdom flag, is scheduled to arrive off Limassol on November 12th, 2018. Late on November 1st, 2018 the ship had just cleared the

Canary Islands on a course due north toward the Straits of Gibraltar. (www.cyprus-mail.com)



Stena IceMax drillship

(Photo source: www.stena-drilling.com)

- November 1st, a National Council meeting has been scheduled for November 12th, 2018 so that President Nikos Anastasiades would brief party leaders over the latest developments in the Cyprus question. Prior to the council meeting, Anastasiades will address the public to inform them about the idea for a decentralized federation as a model for reuniting the island. Government spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said the National Council meeting was initially scheduled for November 5th, 2018, but some party leaders could not make it. Anastasiades will be briefing the leaders about his meeting with Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci on October 26th, 2018 and UN envoy Jane Holl Lute on October 31st, 2018. Prodromou said Anastasiades and Akinci could meet anew on November 12th, 2018 if the two sides strike an agreement over telephone connections. So far there was nothing concrete on the matter, the spokesman said. The Dherynia and Lefka crossings are scheduled to open on the same day. Asked whether there had been a meeting on Thursday on the phone connectivity issue, Prodromou said he had no information on the matter. But unnamed Government sources later told the Cyprus News

Agency that the matter did come up during a meeting attended by Andreas Mavroyiannis, the Greek Cypriot Chief Negotiator. However, no agreement was reached on this confidence-building measure. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Cyprus expresses in highest level its commitment to continue its energy plans exploiting energy resources in Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) despite Turkish aggression. It is estimated that coming days and especially November 12th, 2018 may be a period of high tension while a “hot” security incident should not be excluded. Taking into consideration that Cyprus lacks of military power and especially aeronautical forces it is expected Greece to be engaged more actively in the region. A Greek Navy frigate is already monitoring the Turkish ships. Conduct of aeronautical exercises in cooperation with other countries sends various messages of defense capability, readiness, and determination. The UN Secretary General appears optimistic for a new round of talks between the two communities. President Anastasiades promotes the scenario of a “decentralized federation” and is ready to inform Cypriot political forces about this idea. As long as part of Cyprus remains under Turkish occupation and Turkish troops (equipped with heavy weapons) are deployed in the island, Cyprus faces an existing direct threat against its national security.



F.Y.R.O.M: October 30th, the Skopje Public Prosecutor’s Office has launched a pre-investigative procedure against the President Gjorge Ivanov, regarding two criminal charges related to the non-signing of the Law on

Languages and the Prespa Agreement. The Prosecutor has asked for data and information from the Parliament and the President’s Office regarding his decision not to sign the Laws. “We have asked for information from the Parliament and the President’s Office over the dates of the decisions’ adoption and the reasons why they have not been signed,” announced the Prosecutor’s Office. Ivanov did not sign the Law on the Ratification of the Prespa Agreement, although it was voted twice by the Parliament. According to the Constitution the President has the right to “suspend” a law once but he does not enjoy the right of a full veto. Earlier, he did the same on the Law on the Use of Languages. Therefore, these two regulations have not yet been published in the “Official Gazette” and cannot enter into force. (www.meta.mk, www.mia.mk)

- October 30th, the Government has proposed an extension of the state of emergency at the southern and northern borders by June 30th, 2019, towards preventing the entry and transit of migrants at the territory of F.Y.R.O.M. The Government’s motion has already been filed to the Parliament, which is set to discuss it at committee and plenary sessions. The objective is to ensure continuity of activities by the F.Y.R.O.M Army and the Ministry of Interior in securing and protecting the state border. The state of emergency was introduced in the summer of 2015 due to a large influx of migrants and has been extended since. (www.mia.mk)

- November 2nd, through an inclusive and transparent process, the Government has drafted four draft amendments of the Constitution in accordance with the “Prespa Agreement,” announced the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev at a the

press conference. *“The first amendment is the replacement of the name Macedonia, with Northern Macedonia throughout the Constitution, except of Article 36, where there is a historical aspect. The second refers to the preamble of the Constitution, where the decisions of ASNOM (Anti-fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia) are replaced with the proclamation of the First ASNOM meeting, while the “Ohrid Framework Agreement” is added as a constitutive element of the state. In the third amendment, only one paragraph has been added, and that is that the Republic respects the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the neighboring countries, which gives stronger guarantees of the durability and inviolability of the borders with Greece, although it applies to all neighbors. Finally, in the fourth amendment, in addition of confirming the Macedonian identity, it states that the Republic protects the rights and interests of its citizens home or abroad, and promotes their ties to the homeland,”* Zaev said. The Government announced that session regarding the draft-amendments for changing the constitution in accordance to the “Prespa Agreement” will take place on December 1st, 2018. On November 7th, 2018 the draft amendments will be sent to the Commission for Constitutional Affairs. According to the Rule Book, the hearing within the commission can last mostly up to 3 working days for each amendment separately. Each constitutional amendment will be approved at a plenary parliamentary session with a simple majority of MPs namely 61 votes. As soon as the Parliament states its opinion for each of the amendments, a plenary session will be called for the change of the Constitution for which a two-third majority (80 MPs) will be necessary for approving the amendments. (www.meta.mk)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

The Prime Minister Zaev accelerates procedures for constitutional amendments aiming at concluding the whole process successfully. It is expected late January 2019 the whole process will have been finished successfully. Not only F.Y.R.O.M's future is based on this process, but also Zaev's political future. It is more than certain that constitutional change will end successfully not only because Zaev fully controls political balance in the Parliament but also because international community namely the US and EU strongly supports F.Y.R.O.M's name change. F.Y.R.O.M has become a field of rivalry between the US and EU on the one side and Russia on the other. After Montenegro, NATO seeks to bring F.Y.R.O.M within the alliance isolating Russian influence in the region. Needless to say that in a period where border questions are raised again in the Balkans, F.Y.R.O.M needs political stability and growth prospects.



GREECE: November 3rd, leftist ruling Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA) finalized its proposals for changes to 23 articles of the Greek Constitution, including the separation of the Church and state and changes in the role of the country's President, with a document bearing the signature of its MPs expected to be submitted to the Parliament by the day's end. In their preface to the proposals, the lawmakers referred to the need for a *“Total refashioning of the political system in a more democratic and progressive direction.”* Among the priorities of the review are the *“Recognition of the religious neutrality of the state”* and the granting of the

right to citizens to elect a Greek President when the Parliament is unable to appoint one. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras will have to walk a tightrope as he seeks to strike a delicate balance between the views of his party and those of the junior coalition partner, Independent Greeks (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες - ANEL), on a string of issues. Topping the list of contentious issues is the separation of Church and state, which is not just a matter of disagreement with ANEL but also a source of division within SYRIZA itself. ANEL is also on the opposite side of the aisle to Tsipras on the issue of the country's President, whom the party says should have more powers and be elected directly by the people. The junior coalition partner is also on a different page with regard to higher education and is in favor of changing Article 16 of the Constitution, which prohibits private universities. New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis will present his party's proposals on the constitutional review to the conservative parliamentary group on November 6th, 2018. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- November 3rd, The Government of F.Y.R.O.M submitted draft constitutional amendments to Parliament on November 2nd, 2018 that would formally rename the country “North Macedonia” under the name deal signed with Greece, but Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos has reportedly expressed reservations about an article that hints at a Macedonian people. Pavlopoulos reportedly objected to Article 36 which retains references to a Macedonian “people and identity” and the need to protect the Macedonian “people” living outside the country. Pavlopoulos has insisted that F.Y.R.O.M must make a written commitment that the name deal signed in June does not recognize a Macedonian nation but

rather a citizenship. F.Y.R.O.M Prime Minister Zoran Zaev presented the proposal at a press conference after a meeting of his cabinet and said there is nothing disputable in the four proposed amendments which, he said, are in compliance with international standards. (www.ekathimerini.com)

- November 4th, Greek Foreign Ministry officials said that respect for international law is the only way to ensure stability in the region. The officials were responding to aggressive statements made by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan earlier Sunday, during the launching of a new corvette for his country's Navy. Erdogan's remarks were directed mainly at Cyprus, which Turkey does not recognize; he warned he would not permit what he called the seizing of natural resources in the eastern Mediterranean. “We will not be goaded by Turkey's bouts of aggressive rhetoric,” the officials said. (www.ekathimerini.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Ruling coalition of SYRIZA – ANEL intensifies its efforts to reverse political atmosphere since the country enters gradually in a long pre-electoral period. Tsipras and Kammenos try to gain time planning to relief society with social care measures. Taking into consideration that measures will start to be voted next month it is assessed that early election may be called in May 2019 together with local and European election. Ruling coalition believes that it is enough time so people to enjoy relief measures reversing political climate. Of course there is always the alternative scenario of parliamentary election in autumn 2019. Greece (and Cyprus) enters in a risky period of tension with Turkey. A navy frigate is

already closely monitors the Turkish drilling ship “Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha” while the Turkish NAVTEX surrounding the island of Kastelorizo raises tension. Coming days will be critical to see if Turkey keeps maintaining a war of words or it will escalate situation.



KOSOVO: November 1st, after a long and heated debate related to the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK) proposal to limit Thaci's mandate to negotiate with Serbia on Kosovo's territory, the parties made efforts to harmonize the text of the resolution but in the end everything fell apart. The resolution proposed by the biggest opposition party of LDK and supported by Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) and Social Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Socialdemokrate e Kosovës - PSD) was not adopted. Only 50 out of 90 MPs present at the session voted in favor with no abstention or vote against. Ahead of voting the chief of LDK caucus, Avdullah Hoti, said the opposition has not reached an agreement with the ruling coalition MPs on the points of draft resolution. He said that the LDK was willing to consider some of the amendments proposed by coalition MPs of PDK. The Chief of PDK parliamentary group, Memli Krasniqi, said that there is no willingness to reach an accord and announced their MPs will not attend the voting. Glauk Konjufca from the Self-Determination said ruling coalition MPs are “blindly” defending the President thus making the resolution to fail. Dardan Sejdiu from the parliamentary group of PSD said that they support the resolution and will engage to find an acceptable solution for all. Ahmet Isufi from Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj's party, Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Aleanca për

Ardhmërinë e Kosovës - AAK) stated that parties are showing no willingness to harmonize the text of the resolution. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- November 2nd, Speaker of Kosovo Assembly, Kadri Veseli, commenting on Vucic's call to local Serbs not to join Kosovo Army, said that Serbian President is manipulating Kosovo Serbs. “Regardless protests coming from Belgrade, we will proceed with establishment of Kosovo Army and this is an irreversible process,” Veseli said. “We will do this in cooperation with international community and we are in continuous contact with the US, as well as our partners from NATO, Germany, France, Italy, Croatia, Great Britain,” Veseli said. He also said that Serbian MPs in Kosovo Assembly are against transition of the KSF into an Army because of pressure from Belgrade. Veseli explained that refusal of Serbian MPs to vote constitutional amendments has forced Kosovo Government to bypass Serbian MPs vote and create the Army through amending and supplementing current Law on Kosovo Security Force (KSF). The Parliament of Kosovo passed last month in first reading a package of three laws on transition of the KSF into an Army. Veseli said that transformation of KSF does not mean war or pursuing an aggressive politics, as alleged by Serbia's President Vucic. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- November 2nd, according to Gazetaexpress.com a confidential letter of Robert Cooper, European Council on Foreign Relations member, reveals what is really happening behind the curtains of the secret negotiations on partition of the Republic of Kosovo. These conclusions were penned in a letter that Cooper wrote after a study visit in Belgrade on October 17th – 18th, 2018. As written in the letter, Presidents Hashim Thaci of

Kosovo and Aleksandar Vucic of Serbia are not discussing exchange of territories, but only partition of Kosovo. According to Cooper, Kosovo will give northern part in exchange for Serbia recognizing Kosovo. *“A key topic of debate in Belgrade is the ‘land swap’ proposal; a ‘comprehensive deal’ that would allow Serbia regain disputed territory (North Kosovo) in exchange for Serbia recognizing Kosovo as a state,”* Cooper writes. Among other things Cooper writes that President of Serbia considers that resolving of frozen conflict with Kosovo is of a great importance, even more important than solving some problems Serbia is facing in the rule of law area and democracy. *“He imagines Brussels longing for a heroic Balkan strongman doing geopolitical deals, whereas what it would really like is a predictable, well-run country that minds its own business and gets out well with its neighbors,”* Cooper wrote on Vucic. In the letter Cooper draws some recommendations and conclusions; the Serbian leadership appears to be increasingly aware that if a border deal with Kosovo is to succeed, it needs to have key EU partners, including Germany, on board. The EU foreign policy Chief, Federica Mogherini should put Serbia-Kosovo talks on the agenda of the Foreign Affairs Council soon. The reactive position of the EU in the talks should shift towards encouraging solutions that are legitimate and which enhance stability in the region. But, given that a land swap path may yet turn out to be a blind alley, the EU should also exercise its creative imagination so as to be ready with alternative plans. The clear and open disagreement between the US and Germany was striking and alarming. Depending on the French position, this has the makings of a fairly serious transatlantic gap. The EU leaders and institutions should not lose sight of the underlying paradox:

as President Vucic is unlocking one door to the EU by forging a deal with Kosovo, he is closing another one by consolidating his authoritarian rule and state capture at home. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Kosovo – Serbia negotiations has entered in a critical phase. Although border exchange is on the table there are strong reactions among Kosovo political forces which are opposed in such scenarios. President Thaci is in favor of border correction with Serbia but the Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj is against. It is leaked that an agreement has been reached between the President and the Government that none from Kosovo has a mandate to negotiate border change. However, no resolution achieved in the Parliament. It seems that the U.S (and the EU) factor has a leading role in the background pushing for such a solution. However, it is revealed that talks do not include exchange of territories (Presevo Valley with a significant Albanian minority goes to Kosovo and Northern Kosovo with Serb majority will become Serbian territory), but rather partition of Kosovo (North Kosovo to Serbia for recognizing the state of Kosovo).. Kosovo lacks determination over its critical reforms which will establish in the country rule of law and modern functional administration. Path towards the EU and NATO will be long and hard. A mutual accepted agreement between Kosovo and Serbia is the critical point for the country in order to start approaching the Euro-Atlantic integration. Kosovo army issue is a case which may cause tension with Serbia and it seems that the state seeks to accelerate actions towards transformation of KSF into a regular army. Of

course such unilateral actions are harmful for Kosovo – Serbia dialogue progress.



MOLDOVA: October 31st, from

January 1st, 2019, Russia will remove customs duties for export of Moldovan vegetables, fruits, canned fruits and vegetables and wine products to the Russian Federation. This was stated by President of Moldova Igor Dodon, noting that the relevant agreements were reached during his meeting in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin. As the Head of the Moldovan state noted, the parties agreed to take joint concrete actions to increase the export of Moldovan goods to the Russian market, including the removal of customs duties on exports to Russia. In addition, the interlocutors discussed in detail the possibility of attracting Russian investments in the implementation of infrastructure projects in the interests of residents living on both banks of the Dniester. The President of Moldova expressed sincere gratitude to Vladimir Putin for the technical assistance provided directly to local administrations for improving their administrative and business activities. He assured the Russian President that the absolute majority of Moldovan citizens support the policy of preserving the historically established friendly relations with Russia and strengthening the Moldovan-Russian strategic partnership. (www.infomarket.md)

- November 1st, the importance of solving regional conflicts was discussed within the reunion of the Main Group of the Security Conference of Munich that takes place these days in Minsk. After the debates, the Prime Minister Pavel Filip concluded that it is hard to solve conflicts. *“There are many strategies to solve the conflicts. Some of the conflicts are hard*

to be solved and this is why these need more people to get involved,” said Filip. In this context, Pavel Filip talked about the experience of Moldova in the process of solving the Transnistrian conflict. *“Two things are important in solving a conflict: the surrounding of the conflict and the atmosphere, this is why Moldova tries its best to build a comfortable atmosphere,”* said the Prime Minister. Filip reiterated that Moldova will continue attempts to get rid of the foreign troops from its territory. *“It is important to focus on solving all of our conflicts,”* said Filip. (www.publika.md)

- November 1st, when the Moldovan President Igor Dodon asked for an opinion on the presence of Russian troops on the territory of Moldova, he said: *“In Moldova there are peacekeepers, while the Operational Group of the Russian Troops is a limited group of soldiers. It is not a military base, but soldiers who keep the 14th Army munitions.”* However, it seemed that he is concerned from their presence in Moldova claiming *“We will sit down, discuss, and find a solution. It’s not just once that we’ve discussed about this with Vladimir Vladimirovich about this.”* While President Dodon says that Russian soldiers are *“a limited group of soldiers,”* they often participate in various military activities on the left bank of the Dniester River. Three months ago, the Russian soldiers prepared for the fourth consecutive year to “force” the Nistru River. The Russian officials then said that the exercises aimed at so-called *“overcoming obstacles on the Dniester River.”* The Chisinau Defense Ministry has always called on Russian troops to refrain from such provocative maneuvers but it was ignored. President Igor Dodon considers that the Transnistrian conflict can be solved only if the Moldovan plan is accepted and if there is a

consensus between the three institutional powers in Chisinau – Executive, Legislative and Presidency – on the given subject. On the other hand, Dodon assumes that there is nothing to change – outside the common border of Moldova – Transnistria: the flags, the Parliament, the President. *“We’re in the same boat here. Many times, I have said that the left side can’t go in one direction and the right side in the other. [...] It could not be the Russian plan, because the West won’t receive it. It could not be the Western plan, because Russia won’t accept it. Only the plan of the Republic of Moldova can be accepted at international level and this will be a success for all parties involved,”* Dodon said. (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. Political situation in the country is alarming and the EU has hardened its policy towards Moldova pushing for more reforms which will strengthen state’s transparency, accountability and democratic values. Invalidation of local elections in Chisinau by the Constitutional Court badly affected state’s profile and mainly relations with the EU. Moreover, the Government is sliding into dangerous paths which support corruption and organized crime. The U.S, EU and IMF express their major concerns. By autumn the state has entered in pre-election period although elections are scheduled for February 24th, 2019. The “Transnistria case” is always a “running sore”

for the country working as a potential factor of destabilization.



MONTENEGRO: October 29th, the President of the European Parliament Antonio Taiani expressed his belief that Montenegro will have its place in by 2025. *“I believe that Montenegro will be part of the European Parliament by 2025. The European Commission wants that date, and I want it too,”* said Taiani. Journalists asked him what would be the outcome of the forthcoming elections for the European Parliament, scheduled for May 2019 and how could the elections influence the enlargement process. Taiani said that he hopes for positive results which will be beneficial for the stability of the EU. At the beginning of this month, he spoke to the President of Montenegro, Milo Jukanovic at the seat of the European Parliament in Strasbourg and he said back then that the European path of Montenegro is irreversible and our leadership unquestionable. (www.cdm.me)

- November 1st, the National Police adopted decision which bans entry into Montenegro by Serbian intellectuals, including Matija Beckovic, a Serbian writer. The national border police stated: *“Apart from Beckovic, historians Cedomir Antic and Aleksandar Rakovic will also be denied entry at Montenegro border, as well as the Serbian politician and lawyer Dejan Mirovic.”* All border crossings in Montenegro received the list of people who pose a danger to Montenegrin security and to whom entry would be denied. The Serbian intellectuals barred from entering Montenegro were announced as speakers at the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Podgorica Assembly. (www.cdm.me)

- November 3rd, the EU Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy, Johannes Hahn, said it clearly forum for political discussion in Montenegro is Montenegrin Parliament. The Commissioner was asked to comment on the announcement of the Civic Movement United Reform Action (Građanski Pokret Ujedinjena Reformska Akcija - URA) and the Democratic Montenegro (Demokratska Crna Gora - DCG) that they were going to form non-institutional forum that would deal with electoral legislation. *“The Commissioner expects that all political parties that support Montenegrin EU journey participate actively in the work of temporary assembly committee that has just been established,”* said the representatives of Hahn’s Office. The Montenegrin Parliament adopted the decision on the formation of the Committee for the reform of electoral and other legislation that was formed with the aim of optimizing the overall environment in which the next election cycles will be held. Just a couple of hours later in his social media post Hahn welcomed the formation of this Committee and said he expected everybody’s engagement. Ten hours after Hahn’s post, URA and DCG did completely the opposite of the expectations of Hahn. Leaders of these two parties, Dritan Abazovic and Aleksa Becic announced the participation in the work of their own forum that would consist of their advocates and would act outside the Parliament. Acting in this way, they clearly neglected the requirements of Brussels, although it was not long ago when they presented their reform plans to the Commissioner Hahn right at the EU headquarters. (www.cdm.me)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Major reforms should be implemented in order the country to come closer to the EU. Montenegro shows activity within NATO not only because decided to send troops in Kosovo, but also because plans to join NATO forces in Latvia and Poland. Although the state fulfills its obligations as a full member of the Alliance questions are raised for such initiatives due to their impact in Montenegro’s society but also in country’s foreign relations. A significant number of people is opposed in NATO and maintains pro-Russian stance while Montenegro’s presence in Kosovo may harm relations with Serbia.



ROMANIA: October 29th,

Romania’s Defense Ministry announced that the public purchase procedure for the four multirole corvettes that will endow the Navy will be extended until November 15th, 2018. The Ministry explained that the assessment of the technical offers is ongoing and that it asked for some clarifications. The financial offers will only be opened after the evaluation of the technical offers will be completed. The procedure started on March 1st, 2018. The Romanian Government is looking to buy four multirole corvettes that will be built and equipped at a shipyard in Romania. Dutch group Damen, French Naval Group and Italian Fincantieri are competing for this contract estimated at 1.6 billion euro. The corvettes should be delivered in seven years. The contract also includes the refurbishment of the two frigates operated by the Romanian Navy. (www.romania-insider.com)

- October 30th, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților - ALDE) Chairman, Calin Popescu Tariceanu has denied rumors that the ruling coalition [with

Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat - PSD)] will break up, stating that he has no intention to initiate the breach. *“I didn’t, I don’t and I will not intend to break up the coalition. The same goes for my colleague, PSD Chairman Liviu Dragnea,”* Tariceanu claimed. He also denied information that a new Prime Minister is ready to lead a Government that would also include National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal - PNL) and Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România - USR). *“There were rumors that said the coalition was to break up for sure and that Tariceanu will be named Prime Minister of a Government based on a majority with PNL, USR and so on,”* the ALDE Chair said. He underlined that the coalition will not break up. He explained that the fact that ALDE criticized the Offshore does not mean that ALDE has joined forces with the Opposition parties. Speaking about opponent ideas to the coalition, Tariceanu, who is also Senate Speaker, resumed the idea that Romania is not ready to take over the Presidency of the EU Council, as there is a huge fracture between the ruling power and the opposition, arguing that unless there is a dialogue among all parliamentary parties, Romania will be *“a ruined country.”* *“Given the total political war in the past months, Romania is not ready to take over the EU Council presidency,”* Tariceanu said adding that *“Parliamentary agreement is needed on the rule of law”* proposed by ALDE. (www.romaniajournal.ro)

- November 2nd, Romanian Justice Minister Tudorel Toader’s request for the dismissal of General Prosecutor Augustin Lazar has sparked a big scandal after one of the main arguments for the dismissal turned out to be controversial and ambiguous. The Justice Minister claimed that the

legal procedure for his appointment hadn’t been respected. He also claimed that the file with Lazar’s nomination, which was sent to President Klaus Iohannis, included a resolution of closing an investigation targeting the President, signed by Lazar himself, which would have generated a conflict of interests. However, although he promised he would publish the respective resolution, Toader has not done so. Moreover, the Superior Magistracy Council (CSM), which reviewed the file for Lazar’s nomination, said that it did not include the resolution Toader mentioned. Former Justice Minister Raluca Pruna, who nominated Lazar for this position, also denied the existence of such a document in the file. Meanwhile, the media found that Augustin Lazar signed no resolution in cases targeting Iohannis. However, another prosecutor, Cristian Lazar, had done so in 2014. Thus, it is speculated that Toader may have confused these two people. However, Toader continued to claim there was no mistake. Meanwhile, Augustin Lazar said November 1st, 2018 that he may take the dispute to court. He added that the procedure for his dismissal was flawed and that all the legal requirements for his appointment in 2016 had been met. (www.romania-insider.com)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Political struggle between the President Klaus Iohannis and Government continues in the field of Justice. The EU through several channels expresses its concerns over political situation in Romania hardening its rhetoric. The Venice Commission expressed its concerns over independence of state’s judiciary taking into consideration the promoted amendments on judicial legislation. Iohannis strongly opposes in Government’s plans to intervene in judicial

system while there are specific signs that the Government works towards controlling state's justice. The country is preparing to take over the EU Presidency in the first half of 2019. Romania according to NATO strategic and operational planning has become an advanced base close to Russia.



SERBIA: October 30th the Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic has reportedly said that he *"Has information about the date when the Kosovo army will be formed."* B92 has learned that Vucic said an army would be formed in Kosovo *"On November 28th, 2018; the Albanian Flag Day."* Later in the day, Vucic addressed a news conference to tell reporters that *"A very difficult month is ahead of us,"* and that as the President of the Republic, he felt *"concerned."* He spoke about the fact that ethnic Albanians are trying to *"Forcefully seize the electricity transmission network leading from Novi Pazar (in southwestern parts of central Serbia) to the north of Kosovo."* He then confirmed that there is a plan on November 28th, 2018 to declare *"The Army of Kosovo."* *"This is contrary to both their constitution and the spirit of all agreements and (UN Security Council) Resolution 1244, and the Kumanovo and the Brussels agreements, and the Brussels agreement with NATO. In the meantime, we will have Interpol, too, (i.e., Pristina's bid to join the organization that Serbia is opposed to), and a discussion in the Pristina Parliament. They want to limit the scope of their delegation's work, after which the question of the meaning of the dialogue will be raised,"* the President said. *"When I say all this, it's clear to you how difficult our situation is. They are completely united, all Albanians, all parties. I do not want my party to be united with the worst in Serbia - the*

unity of the people is necessary, we will need the strength of the people now more than ever," Vucic said. (www.b92.net)

- November 1st, the sixth of the Russian MiG-29 warplanes that has been generally overhauled in Russia has landed at the Batajnica military airport near Belgrade. The new MiG-29 now in service of the Serbian Army's RV-PVO (Air Force and Air Defense), registration number 18201, has been brought to Belgrade onboard the strategic Russian transport plane An-124 Ruslan, a source told Sputnik. The total amount of six donated Russian warplanes were delivered to Serbia in October last year, and after completing the customs procedure, were sent back to Russia for overhaul. Serbia has received the aircraft as part of the military-technical cooperation with the Russian Federation. According to Sputnik's sources, this MiG-29s, variant 9-13, were produced in 1989 - a somewhat more advanced models than those received by the Yugoslav RV-PVO in 1987 and 1988. (www.b92.net)



Serbian MIG-29 fighter aircraft

(Photo source: www.vs.rs)

- November 1st, security situation in Kosovo is complex, said Interior Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic. He claimed that Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic is not the enemy of the Albanians living in Kosovo, but of those who want to expel and kill the Serbs living in that

southern province. Commenting on information that “*Chaos on the bridge at the Ibar River on Albanian Flag Day (November 28) is being prepared*” Stefanovic said “*This is already known and the situation is complex.*” He added that the President is “*Trying to protect the rights of Serbs, because they are today threatened in Kosovo.*” Pristina has started lobbying strongly for the Kosovo entrance to Interpol, Interior Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic also said. (www.b92.net)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Relative security stability. Serbia's path towards the EU and NATO goes through Kosovo case resolution. Although dialogue has started in Brussels is full of obstacles which undermine establishment of confidence and good will between two parties. However, Vucic's statements show that Serbia is ready to compromise recognizing that it cannot gain everything through negotiations. Actions of ethnic minorities in Serbia such as Albanians in south Serbia or Muslim Bosnians in Sandzak region touch the sensitive issue of national security of the state. By expressing neutrality and maintaining equal distance from the U.S.A and Russia it moves in an environment of fragile balance. Serbian President and Government assess that current international “atmosphere” is in favor of Serbia after a long political and diplomatic isolation of the state.



SLOVENIA: October 30th,

Slovenia plans to send its first two satellites to space in the first half of 2019. Trisat and Nemo HD will provide data that, in combination with data from the EU Copernicus program, will help develop solutions in agriculture, forestry and urbanism, and will provide invaluable data

following natural disasters. The Government said that the satellites would be sent to space on a Vega rocket launched by Arianespace, a company developing launch solutions for the European Space Agency (ESA). Trisat is a nano-satellite, weighing only 4.4 kilos, capable of taking multispectral images of Earth in short-wave infrared spectrum. It is to be used for at least two years. It will be deployed at the altitude of 500 kilometers in a Sun-synchronous orbit, according to the Trisat program of the University of Maribor, which has developed it. Nemo HD has been developed by Vesolje-SI, the Slovenian centre of excellence for space sciences and technologies. Some 85% of the funds for the 65-kilo satellite came from the EU and the rest from Slovenia's budget. The micro-satellite will be orbiting the Earth at 600 kilometers producing panchromatic and multispectral images. Slovenia hopes to use the data collected by the satellites to follow the growth of crops and the effects of irrigation and fertilization in real time. The images produced by the satellites are also expected to be helpful tools in case of natural disasters. Not only would the images help with analysis of natural disaster effects, Nemo HD could also provide real-time imagery invaluable in dispatching search and rescue teams. One of the key goals in launching the two satellites is to demonstrate Slovenian space technology and promote the country's space engineering know-how, according to the Government. (www.sta.si)

- November 3rd, Andrej Sisko, leader of the self-proclaimed local paramilitary group will remain in custody after the Supreme Court upheld the argument of lower Court that he represents a danger against constitutional order. “There are reasonable grounds to believe that the suspect established a paramilitary unit and called for the

establishment of more militias across Slovenia that would, when the time was the right one, bring down the highest authorities of the state,” the Supreme Court said. Decision came in response to an appeal by the defense, which argued that Sisko’s actions were not against the constitutional order. Sisko has been in detention since early September 2018, a week after a video has showed him with lining up with several dozen men, some of them armed wearing balaclavas and conducting what appeared to be basic military training. Sisko a former ultras who served in prison for attempted murder has argued that was a provocation meant to disclose how Slovenian media work, but at the same time he called for the establishment of other such militias around the country. The Head of Maribor Prosecutor’s Office, Darko Simonic, said that the Court investigation is still ongoing and witnesses’ hearings will continue next week. Sisko has been active in politics for years and he had run in last year’s presidential election. This year is one of the 18 candidates of Maribor’s Mayor in the coming local elections. (www.total-slovenia-news.com)

- November 4th, the Slovenian President Borut Pahor recalled today, nine years ago, Croatian Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor signed an arbitration agreement in Stockholm, under which the Arbitration Tribunal determined the border between the two countries. Pahor said through social media that, despite the rejection of Croatia, the border decision will sooner or later be implemented. According to Pahor the arbitration agreement ended an 18-year period of border disputes, while the neighboring countries strengthened economic cooperation. In accordance with the agreement, the Arbitration Tribunal set last year borders between the two countries. “Regardless of the different views on

Court decision and Croatia’s refusal to implement it, sooner or later it will be adopted,” Pahor assessed. “*When I held the negotiations with Croatian President Kosor on the conclusion of the arbitration agreement in 2009, the Croatian Parliament, although previously said it would not do so, changed its position. And I think he’ll change it this time too. Sooner or later. This requires certain patience in Slovenia,”* Pahor said. The President claimed that it is strategically important that Slovenia has good relations with all four neighbors and that with a smart policy it will make Croatia to accept the arbitration award. (www.dnevnik.si)

COUNTRY ASSESSMENT :

Slovenia enjoys a relative political stability after formation of a minority Government. Ruling coalition has a lot to do in economy and social car, while there open issues in foreign policy. Border dispute with Croatia is still ongoing and former Government of Miro Cerar filed a lawsuit against Croatia over its refusal to implement the border arbitration and it is still a question how the new Government will continue with the case.



TURKEY: October 30th, a Turkish ship will start drilling for oil and gas in the Mediterranean November 1st, 2018, Energy Minister Fatih Donmez said a move that could create tensions with neighboring Cyprus and Greece over jurisdiction. Attempts to tap gas and oil in the eastern Mediterranean, along with a dispute over Greece’s maritime borders have recently caused friction between Athens and Ankara. Turkey and the internationally recognized Greek Cypriot Government in Cyprus have overlapping claims of jurisdiction for

offshore oil and gas research in the eastern Mediterranean, a region thought to be rich in natural gas. Speaking at a ceremony for the launch of the drilling ship “Fatih”, Donmez said it would begin drilling at the Alanya-1 borehole, located 100 kilometres off the southern province of Antalya and 60 kilometres off Antalya's Alanya district. *“Turkey has set its main goal as independence in energy,”* Donmez said. *“We don't have an eye on others' resources; our only issue is to present to our people the riches within our territory.”* The first borehole will be some distance from the disputed territory, which lies further south and around Cyprus. Turkey is almost completely reliant on imports to meet its energy needs and the lira's tumble against the dollar this year has driven up that cost, putting pressure on energy companies to raise prices for consumers. To meet more of its needs domestically, Turkey recently announced a tender for operation rights of three new solar power plants and privatized seven coal fields. It also opened a new refinery to reduce dependence on imported oil products. Donmez said that Turkey is also very close to buy another drilling ship. Turkey warned Greece last week to stay out of its activities in the eastern Mediterranean, heralding a potential showdown with Cyprus. Turkey claims any offshore wealth also belongs to the Turkish Cypriots and not exclusively to the Greek Cypriots. Greek Cypriots, who run the island's internationally recognized Government, say any future benefits of gas finds will eventually be shared by all Cypriots if a resolution of the Cyprus question will be achieved. (www.nytimes.com)

- October 31st, Turkey has started work on making its first domestically produced long-range air defense missile system, President Recep Tayyip

Erdogan announced. The first delivery of the system named Siper (meaning trench in English) is planned for 2021, Erdogan said at the opening ceremony of the National Technology Development Infrastructure. The ceremony was held at the Turkish Scientific and Technological Research Council's (TÜBİTAK) Defense Industry Research and Development Institute (SAGE) campus in Ankara. Turkey is moving rapidly on the way to have a say in all fields of defense, aviation and space technologies, Erdogan said. *“We have increased our locality rate in the defense industry from 20% to 65% ... We will reach the target of an independent and strong Turkey by uninterruptedly continuing our national defense moves we have initiated in the defense industry,”* he noted. *“Our need for long-range regional air defense missile system comes up on different occasions. National long-range regional air defense missile system works were initiated by TÜBİTAK SAGE, Aselsan and Roketsan. Their first deliveries are scheduled to take place at the end of 2021,”* the President said. He also noted that important results were obtained especially in terms of high-resolution observation, communication satellites and sub-systems, satellite launch systems, satellite data processing, and storage and information support systems. *“Our defense industry sector has turned into a national structure with the participation of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), research institutions and universities alongside more than a thousand companies today,”* Erdogan said. Turkey's aviation and defense industry exports increased by nearly 14%, reaching over 900 million dollars in the first half of this year, versus the same period last year. Exports, about 795.71 billion dollars in the January-June period of 2017, rose to some 906.41 billion dollars this year, while aviation and defense industry exports in the

last 12-month period reached nearly 1.85 billion, according to Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TİM) data. Turkish defense contractors ASELSAN and ROKETSAN have already developed air-defense missiles for low altitude (Hisar-A, 15 km) and medium altitude (Hisar-O, 25 km) to defend against fixed and rotary wing aircraft, cruise missiles, air-to-ground missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles in order to protect military bases, ports, facilities and troops from air threats. The Hisar-A and Hisar-O are expected to be in service by 2020 and 2021, respectively. The Korkut air defense system, which has already begun to be delivered to the Land Forces Command, will provide protection against aerial targets. Meanwhile, in September last year, Turkey agreed to buy two S-400s surface-to-air missiles from Russia in a deal worth over 2 billion dollars. Officials from Ankara have repeatedly said that the purchase of the S-400 systems was prompted to fulfill the country's security needs. Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said last week that the installation of the S-400 missile system would begin in October 2019. (www.dailysabah.com)



Korkut self-propelled air-defense system

(Photo source: www.aselsan.com.tr)

- November 2nd, Turkey has been indicating with recent military operations that it will not tolerate Kurds east of the Euphrates, and it has been

taking steps to clear the People's Protection Units (YPG) from Manbij as well. Although Turkey has strongly objected to the U.S partnership with the YPG on multiple occasions, the U.S. has insisted on finding a balance on which it can continue its partnership with the YPG and “persuade” Ankara to come to an understanding. However, high-level officials from Ankara indicated that Washington's efforts are in vain as Turkey considers the PKK-linked YPG a national security threat. They have also been highly vocal in their criticism of the U.S' steadfast support for the Kurds. Ankara believes that the U.S. uses fight against ISIS as an excuse to justify its heavy arms support to the group which signals that Washington has long-term objectives in the region. Last week, Turkish troops stationed at the Syrian border hit YPG fighters in the Ayn al-Arab area east of the Euphrates river in northern Syria, killing at least 14 people. Following the developments, the Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) also ramped up its preparations for further operations against the YPG. The recent operation east of the Euphrates showed that Ankara will not shy away from taking necessary steps to protect its interests as its patience has already been thin due to the sluggish Manbij process with the U.S. Turkey and the U.S. decided on a road map in Syria's Manbij which foresees the retreat of the YPG from the region. Yet, there were significant delays in the implementing of the deal, which urged Turkey to take initiatives in targeting Kurdish groups east of the Euphrates. Turkish and U.S. military started conducting joint patrols in northern Syria's Manbij in line with the deal. Turkish and U.S. troops patrolled around the Saju Stream, which separates the Manbij frontline from the city of Jarablus, an area falling under Operation “Euphrates Shield.” Meanwhile, following the first joint patrol in Manbij, President Recep

Tayyip Erdogan and his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump discussed bilateral issues, including the latest developments in Syria, such as Manbij and Idlib, in a phone call on November 1st, 2018. White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders also gave information about the Erdogan-Trump meeting in a written statement, stating that the two leaders particularly addressed the desire to work together on coordination in Syria. (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. Local and international observers claim the country moves towards an authoritarian regime with thousands of citizens being persecuted. Turkish – U.S relations have strongly been harmed forcing Ankara to approach new allies such as Russia. Turkey re-examines its relations with the EU in an effort to avoid international and regional isolation. Turkish economy is under heavy pressure and at the moment is its “Achille’s heel” bringing the state on the edge of collapse. Turkish Armed Forces have been engaged in military operations against Kurds and PKK in Northern Iraq and in Syria as well. The state tries to show a leading role regarding Syria’s “next day” claiming that developments in its neighboring country are related to its national security mainly because of the Kurds . Kurdish question is a major security threat for Turkey affecting stability, peace and even unity of the state. Finally, Turkey pays special attention to its interests in East Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea. It is ready to start oil and gas drills, and also looks


determined to prevent any Greek – Cypriot activity in the region.


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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