

DECEMBER 18 - 24, 2017 – ISSUE 5



**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 © 2017

“HERMES” Institute for Foreign Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy

All rights reserved

ALBANIA: December 18th, Arta Marku was elected by the Parliament as the new Provisional Prosecutor General amid strong reactions from the opposition. Marku was elected by the ruling majority; a procedure which is considered as unconstitutional by the opposition. Opposition did not hesitate to throw tear gases in the Parliament during the session in an effort to stop the procedure. Opposition supporters were protesting outside the Parliament and when situation was escalated they clashed with the Police. Protesters threw tear gases and tried to enter the Parliament building but after the Special Intervention Forces intervention situation came under control. The Albanian Constitution recently was amended as part of the Judiciary Reform, stating that the new Prosecutor General should be appointed by the new High Council of the Prosecution, but this Council has not been established yet. Prime Minister, Edi Rama invited the opposition to sit and discuss for a new Provisional Prosecutor General until the High Council of Prosecution to be established, but the opposition refused claiming that the only way to appoint a new Prosecutor was the Constitution's provisions and by establishing the High Council of Prosecution. They urged the Government to work with them for establishing this Council and keep current Prosecutor, Adriatik Llalla on duty until then. Rama rejected the opposition's request to let Llalla in power longer than his term, and, quoting the legal advice received from OPDAT (Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training Program) and EURALIUS (European Assistance Mission to the Albanian Justice System), which are the US and EU missions in Albania respectively, the Prime Minister decided to use an alternative for appointing the new Provisional Prosecutor General; only by the

majority votes causing a political stalemate. (www.albaniannews.com, www.top-channel.tv, www.balkaninsight.com)

- December 22nd, Albanian Government's decision to vote in favor of the UN resolution (and against the U.S will) regarding the U.S recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel caused political reactions not only within the country but also in Kosovo. First reaction came from the Albanian President, Ilir Meta who via his spokesperson, Tedi Blushi expressed his annoyance for Government's actions claiming that has not been informed or consulted about Albania's stance in the UN. Meta sees Albania's vote as unnecessary because it does not reflect the national consensus of Albania. According to Blushi *"We must not forget that the USA remains the most important and strategic ally, and such decisions should be well coordinated. People of Albania will always be grateful to the historic decisions of the USA regarding the existence of our nation and the Euro-Atlantic future of Albania and Kosovo."* On the other hand, leader of Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – PD), Lulzim Basha said that Government's stance in the UN was a mistake reminding that in 2012 Albania abstained from a similar voting. Basha claimed *"Voting against the USA, the Government of Albania has voted against the national interests of Albanians. Until today, we have no information that the EU has imposed the vote as a condition. So, there was no reason for Albania to change its stance."* The Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim – LSI) also reacted through its Deputy Chair, Klajda Gjoshaj who said *"The Albanian people have never voted against the USA. This government has been divided from the stance of our citizens. Their vote against the*

USA is a vote against Kosovo.” According to the newspaper “Express” Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci has stated that Prishtina would have aligned with Washington at any circumstance, even if it was the only country voting side by side with the USA. (www.top-channel.tv)

- December 23rd, “*We will increase our presence by 60% in Afghanistan in 2018*” said the Defense Minister, Olta Xhaka during a reception ceremony of the 6th Contingent that completed its mission in Kabul and at the same time the departing ceremony of the 3rd Contingent in Herat, Afghanistan. Xhaka said “*We remain committed to continue contributing by increasing on 60% our presence in Afghanistan for 2018, thus responding positively to President Trump's new strategy on Afghanistan.*” The ceremony was attended by the Ambassador of Italy in Albania, Alberto Cutillo and Deputy Ambassador of Turkey in Albania, Sinan Cem Baş. Also present were military attaches of the Republic of Italy and Turkey to Albania. (www.mod.gov.al)



Reception ceremony of the 6th and 3rd Contingent
(Photo source: www.mod.gov.al)

BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA:

December 19th, President of Republika Srpska (RS), Milorad Dodik said that his entity will follow Serbia when it comes to the demarcation of Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) and Serbia and the consent from the RS has already been raised

on this issue. He confirmed that two members of the Geodetic Authority of RS and Commission for the Borders of B&H will also follow the policies of RS. (www.sarajevotimes.com)

- December 19th, Chairman of Presidency of Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H), Dragan Covic, said that the third entity is a real possibility for B&H and it needs to be considered. According to Covic “I think this would be a solution that would be acceptable for everyone”. However the U.S Embassy in Sarajevo reacted against Covic’s statements “*The U.S opinion on this issue is well known and remains unchanged. The U.S is committed to the principles of the Dayton Peace Agreement – B&H as a democratic, multi-ethnic, sovereign and independent state with two entities, three constitutive people, with unquestioned territorial integrity. We firmly reject any further geographical division of B&H, including the possibility of forming the third entity, and strongly oppose the reorganization based on ethnic principles.*” (www.sarajevotimes.com)

BULGARIA: December 20th, Bulgarian Defense Minister, Krasimir Karakachanov stated that the Ukrainian state-owned company Ukroboronprom submitted a complaint to the Bulgarian Commission for Protection of Competition requesting the temporary suspension of his Ministry's single-source tender inviting Russian Aircraft Corporation MiG (RSK MiG) to provide logistical support to Bulgaria's 15 MiG-29 fighter jets. This will most likely temporarily block the procurement for weeks or months, prompting Karakachanov to speak of “sabotage”. At the same time Karakachanov announced the failure of talks with MTG Dolphin PLC Company regarding construction of two multipurpose patrol ships for Bulgarian Navy. The Company decided

not to sign the contract. (www.bta.bg, www.janes.com)

CROATIA: December 19th, Slovenian Prime Minister, Miro Cerar visited Zagreb in an attempt to move forward in resolving the long-running territorial dispute with Croatia over waters in the Piran Gulf ahead of December 29th, 2017, the deadline envisioned as the implementation of the decision. The Croatian Government maintained the position of the previous administration in Zagreb, claiming that the arbitration process was compromised. While some Slovenian coalition members expressed a lack of optimism that the meeting will end the dispute, Karl Erjavec, Vice-Prime Minister, said that he hopes Cerar will not sign any bilateral agreement. *“I hope our prime minister will not sign or accept any obligations because we have bad experiences with Croatian politics. We can’t even start talking about a bilateral agreement because it would mean that we would give up the arbitration [decision]”* Erjavec said. He concluded that Cerar should inform Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic about measures Slovenia will take if Croatia does not conform to the decision by December 29th, 2017 the deadline for its implementation. Erjavec previously announced a plan to sue Croatia before the EU Court of Justice in Luxembourg due to its decision not to implement the verdict. After the meeting Cerar said *“We spoke about the arbitration decision as December 29 is the last day to implement it. We are ready and will continue with implementation where we do not need Croatia...I believe that only the implementation of the arbitration decision can bring about better cooperation and have it as a good practice for the entire region. The fact is the decision cannot be partially implemented and*

contains a land and sea portion. As far as I understood my colleague Andrej, there is a possibility Croatia views this differently but we only trust the arbitration decision. Our standpoint is clear. Non-implementation of the arbitration decision means violation of international and European law and we will resort to a lawsuit if Croatia does not honor the decision.” On the other side Plenkovic claimed *“I repeat the intention is important and I emphasize that we are coherent on the land border some 90%. At this moment Croatia cannot implement a decision which we do not find binding. The most important message from today’s meeting is that we are conducting a dialogue in European spirit and it leaves no doubts.”* (www.total-croatia-news.com, www.balkaninsight.com)



Croatian Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic meets his Slovenian counterpart, Miro Cerar
(Photo source: www.vlada.gov.hr)

CYPRUS: December 19th, Nicosia announced it is ready to address Ankara’s plans on its Exclusive Economic Zone in a calm, serious and effective manner. Announcement was made on the fact that Turkey is moving ahead with its plans in Block 6 of Cyprus’ EEZ and has already issued a NAVTEX. According to the Deputy Government Spokesman Victoras Papadopoulos *“We are ready to face Turkey’s*

threats and plans for illegal drilling in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone, as we have done so far, in an effective and cool manner." Speaking after a Cabinet meeting, Papadopoulos pointed out that the government will exercise its sovereign rights as it has done to date, and at the same time it will continue its effective policy. He also said that it will protest Turkey's NAVTEX. (www.cyprus-mail.com)

- December 19th, the SAIPEM 10000 ultra deepwater drillship continued on its course for Cyprus, where later this month it is scheduled to carry out exploratory drilling for natural gas in block 6. The drillship's estimated time of arrival offshore Cyprus was listed as December 27th, 2017. According to daily "Phileleftheros", drilling at the first target – dubbed "Kalipso" – in block 6 is expected to start on December 30th, 2017. The drillship has been leased by the consortium of ENI and Total which have the license on block 6. Operations in block 6 are expected to wrap up by early February 2018, after which the drillship will almost immediately head to block 3 – also licensed to ENI – for another exploratory drill. The target in block 3 is codenamed "Soupia". Turkey, which does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus, claims that block 6 partially falls within the outer limits of its continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean. In a letter sent to the United Nations in May, Turkey's permanent representative to the UN, Feridun Sinirlioglu expressed "*grave concerns*" over Cyprus licensing the acreage in question. Sinirlioglu added that "*Turkey is committed to protecting its sovereign rights emanating from international law and will not allow foreign companies to conduct unauthorized hydrocarbon*

exploration and exploitation activities on its continental shelf." (www.cyprus-mail.com)

F.Y.R.O.M: December 21st, the F.Y.R.O.M - Bulgaria friendship treaty signed on August 1st, 2017 has boosted military cooperation between the two neighboring countries. Members of the Armed Forces of F.Y.R.O.M Special Operations Regiment recently visited the Bulgarian Armed Forces' 68th Special Forces Brigade in Plovdiv to prepare joint military exercises planned for 2018. In addition, joint training of military pilots has been agreed. (www.janes.com)

- December 23rd, F.Y.R.O.M's opposition right-wing Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство – VMRO-DPMNE) elected Hristijan Mickoski as its new leader. He will succeed former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, who took over party leadership in 2003. Mickoski, who previously held the post of secretary general in the party, won 376 votes out of a possible 428 from delegates present at the party congress in the southeastern town of Valandovo. He was the only candidate standing. Some 130 delegates, including former and current high-ranking party members and MPs were absent, highlighting a hidden split inside the party which run F.Y.R.O.M's Government for the past 11 years until May. They previously complained that the election of a new leader was rushed and rigged in favor of Mickoski, who they saw as no more than Gruevski's "puppet". Mickoski is a relatively newcomer to the political scene, and the wider public has heard for first time about him when he was appointed as the party secretary general in

July this year. This was part of a broader leadership shuffle that happened just after the party was ousted from Government in May, amid widespread concerns about corruption and authoritarianism. (www.balkaninsight.com)



Newly elected VMRO-DPMNE leader
Hristijan Mickoski
(Photo source: www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk)

GREECE: December 20th, before the Parliament, controlled by the Government's coalition, passed more austerity in a 2018 budget, major opposition leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis of New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) said a primary surplus financing handout was built by overtaxing Greeks. The budget passed with the support of all 144 lawmakers from Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – SYRIZA), including its alleged hard core Group of 53 that has barked over austerity, and the nine votes from Independent Greeks (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες – ANEL), a three-vote majority in the 300-member body.

(www.thenationalherald.com,
www.naftemporiki.gr)

- December 24th, leader of ruling coalition party Independent Greeks (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες – ANEL), Panos Kammenos said his party will not consent to a name that includes the term “Macedonia” regarding the name dispute between Greece and F.Y.R.O.M. Kammenos, who is also Defense Minister, said that during a meeting of Greek political party leaders under then President Constantine Karamanlis in 1992, it had been agreed that the use of the word “Macedonia” was a nonstarter for Greece. Deciding otherwise would require a fresh meeting under the current President, he added. Main opposition New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία – ND) leader, Kyriakos Mitsotakis has set the issue of parliamentary majority in case Panos Kammenos does not support the Government's choice in the solution of the F.Y.R.O.M name issue. He said that “there cannot be national agreement without specific proposal agreed by both Government partners. If Mr. Tsipras and Mr. Kammenos are not able to agree on a major issue of national importance, they should resign.” (www.ekathimerini.com, www.thenationalherald.com)

KOSOVO: December 21st, President of the Supreme Court of Kosovo, Enver Peci, said that the EU should close its rule of law mission in Kosovo – EULEX noting that Kosovo is capable of dealing with its own problems. Peci admitted that Kosovo citizens do not trust the judiciary, noting however that fighting organized crime and corruption requires strengthening of the independence of judicial system. Peci also said that the EULEX mission should end its mission, as according to him, the time has come for

Kosovo to face its problems as an independent and sovereign state. (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- December 22nd, Kosovo MPs have started collecting signatures to call an extraordinary session of the Assembly December 26th, 2017, in a desperate effort to abrogate the Law on Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office. According to "Gazeta Express" this initiative is being supported also by Kosovo top leaders - President Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, and Parliament's Speaker Kadri Veseli. The war crimes court based at The Hague will deal with alleged crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Diplomatic sources claimed that such a move which is supported by the most senior officials of Kosovo would have serious consequences and will seal Kosovo's isolation by making impossible for the country to join the European Union or get visa liberalization. The Association of KLA war veterans submitted December 21st, 2017 at the Kosovo Assembly the petition signed by over 15 thousand people. The petition demands from the Assembly to abolish the Law on Specialist Chambers although the initial text during the signatures collection was requesting the amendment of the law. Representatives of the opposition party Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës – LDK), implied that they will not support abrogation of the Law. After all Assembly Speaker Kadri Veseli invited the Assembly Presidency and caucuses' chiefs to a meeting to discuss the MPs' request on abrogation of the special war crimes court, which will deal with alleged crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The U.S Ambassador in Kosovo Greg Delawie expressed his strong reaction in the idea of changing the Special Court Law which could globally isolate

Kosovo. According to Delawie "*Terrible idea. Don't turn back the clock.*" British Ambassador to Kosovo Ruairi O'Connell, said at the Assembly building "*that tonight could be the most dangerous night for Kosovo since the war*" while the Head of the EU Office in Kosovo, Nataliya Apostolova, has reacted to the initiative claiming "*Kosovo Assembly's initiative to abrogate Law on Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecution Office is appalling and extremely damaging for Kosovo. Such action would jeopardize all joint work over past years in rule of law & justice and undermine all who stand up for ending impunity.*" (www.gazetaexpress.com)

- December 23rd, opposition MPs boycotted Assembly's Presidency urgent meeting leading to collapse of an initiative of the ruling coalition MPs to repeal the Law on Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office, established to investigate and try alleged crimes committed by former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The Assembly failed at calling the session because the Presidency, which would decide on whether the Assembly would convene, failed to reach a quorum as the Democratic League of Kosovo (Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës – LDK), "Self-Determination" (Vetevendosje), and Serb List (Српска листа) boycotted the meetings. (www.gazetaexpress.com, www.pristinainsight.com)

MOLDOVA: December 18th, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it has decided to recall Ambassador of Moldova in Moscow Andrei Neguța to Chisinau for consultations, for an indefinite period. According to the Ministry the decision was made due to the incidents of harassment and intimidation by the Russian Federation authorities of officials and politicians

from the Republic of Moldova, intensified recently and the lack of official responses to the repeated requests of the Moldovan authorities for clarification. (www.mfa.gov.md)

- December 19th, leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova – PDM), Vlad Plahotniuc, announced about replacing seven Ministers within the Government. This move was made right after the Prime-Minister Filip congratulated his Cabinet for “professionalism and seriousness”. The new Ministers are Lurie Leanca as Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, Cristina Lisnic as Deputy Prime-Minister for Reintegration, Tudor Ulianoschi as Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Chiril Gaburici as Minister of Economy and Infrastructure, Alexandru Tanase as Minister of Justice, Liviu Volcovici as Minister of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment, and Svetlana Cebotari as Minister of Healthcare, Work and Social Protection. President Igor Dodon declared that he would be willing to sign the resignation letters of the current ministers but that he would reject the new ministers, suggesting “*some should stay in prison, not in the seat of Vice Prime-Minister.*” (www.moldova.org)

MONTENEGRO: December 21st, by joining NATO, Montenegro committed itself to acquiring military radar for the needs of controlling its airspace by 2020. This is stated in the information on Montenegro’s military integration into NATO, adopted by the government at the last cabinet’s meeting. According to the Government “*Due to the unfavorable configuration of the terrain and poor radar coverage of the territory of Montenegro of about 60%, there was a need for procurement of*

military radar for airspace monitoring, as one of the priorities in terms of equipment for the next period. The Defense Ministry plans to buy the radar by 2020, and by that time NATO will try to overcome the problem by engaging resources from its own capacities.” (www.cdm.me)

- December 23rd, Civic Movement United Reform Action (Građanski Pokret Ujedinjena reformska akcija – URA) will start negotiations on draft coalition agreement with Democratic Montenegro (Demokratska Crna Gora – DCG) in order to form a more powerful political alliance. These talks raise the question over a possible candidacy of DCG leader Aleksa Becic for the presidential elections in 2018. Negotiations conducted between URA and DCG oppose the position of the Social Democratic Party of Montenegro (Socijaldemokratska Partija Crne Gore – SDP) leader, Ranko Krivokapic, who considers boycott as the only option for the upcoming presidential elections. (www.cdm.me)

ROMANIA: December 21st, President Klaus Iohannis said the European Commission (EC) could also invoke the Article 7 of the EU treaty in the case of Romania because of the amendments to the justice laws. The EC yesterday triggered the so-called Article 7 process in the case of Poland. This could ultimately lead to the suspension of Poland’s EU voting rights over concerns about the rule of law. Iohannis also said that Justice Minister Tudorel Toader is avoiding him. All eyes are on the Romanian President who is expected to do something to oppose the adoption of the justice laws. Iohannis said that he would step in “at the right moment”, adding that calling for a referendum on justice was not his only option. The Senate approved several changes to the justice laws this week. The bills will go to

President Iohannis for promulgation. He has the right to sent them back to the Parliament for review, but only once. (www.romania-insider.com)

SERBIA: December 21st, according to the daily Vecernje Novosti Serbia and Russia agreed in the most significant issues during the meeting in Kremlin of the Russian President Vladimir Putin and Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic. The two men agreed on these four basic points; Russia will firmly represent Belgrade's position regarding the final status of Kosovo and Metohija. As the manufacturer, Russia has given consent in principle to allow Serbia to negotiate the acquisition of S-300 air defense missile systems from Belarus. Serbia has been officially invited to participate in the Turkish Stream gas pipeline project which would ensure the country's energy security. Serbia has undertaken an obligation to continue to side with Russia in the international arena, in this way at the same time protecting its own interests, including not to impose sanctions on Russia. (www.b92.net)

- December 21st, Serbia negotiates the purchase of heavy military equipment from Russia. This was confirmed during the Prime Minister's Aleksandar Vucic in Russia where he met President Vladimir Putin. Serbian Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin said "*high level of military cooperation*" between the two countries was agreed during this visit. Vulin said Serbia wants to buy six Mi-17 helicopters as well as form an overhaul base for the Russian choppers, which in effect would give Russian military personnel a presence in the region. He said that close military and other ties with Russia have "*significantly changed and strengthened*" Serbia's position internationally. In October 2017, the

Serbian Air Force received six MiG-29 fighter jets from Russia, which has also promised the delivery of 30 battle tanks and 30 armored vehicles to Serbia. Apart from that, Serbia and Russia are discussing supplies of Buk-M1 and Buk-M2 anti-aircraft missile systems. Serbia is also negotiating the delivery of six additional MiG-29s and air defense systems (possibly the S-300) from Belarus. (www.defensenews.com)

- December 22nd, leader of the opposition People's Party (Народна Странка) Vuk Jeremic intensifies his efforts towards the formation of a united opposition front against the current governmental coalition; "Everyone from the true opposition is welcome, the Democratic Party, the DJB (movement), and the Dveri. The opposition front has begun to expand and we showed that we can reach agreement. It would be rational for the opposition to agree on a joint appearance in Belgrade as soon as possible" Jeremic said. According to him his party and the Movement of Free Citizens (Покрет слободних грађана – PSG) are the opposition's core and both are in favor of a broader opposition front. Jeremic said that the fate of the Serbian Progressive Party-led (Српска напредна странка – SNS) Government will be decided in Belgrade. In his opinion the "*backward system*" can only be changed by "*striking the dragon to the head*" and pointed out that local elections in Belgrade represent "*a good opportunity that should be used.*" (www.b92.net)

SLOVENIA: December 22nd, Kosovo's First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Behgjet Pacolli visited Ljubljana. Following talks with Slovenian Foreign Minister Karl Erjavec, Pacolli spoke very highly of Slovenia and of the support which, he underlined,

Slovenia has always offered to Kosovo. Erjavec noted the excellent relations between the two countries and promised Kosovo technical assistance, among other things. The main topic of the talks was bilateral cooperation between Slovenia and Kosovo with an emphasis on economic and development cooperation. In terms of economic cooperation, Slovenia was one of the first and at the same time one of the biggest investors in Kosovo. It is currently in fourth place among foreign investors in Kosovo, while Slovenian direct investment, which is focused on various sectors of the economy, amounts to approximately 188 million Euros. Trade between Slovenia and Kosovo was worth 95 million Euros in 2016 and this figure continues to increase. A further important topic of the talks was Kosovo's integration into the European Union and NATO. Erjavec called on Kosovo to continue with the implementation of reforms and with its cooperation with the EULEX mission. He expressed his solid support for Kosovo in the fulfillment of its commitments under the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the European Union and Kosovo. Slovenia will continue to support Kosovo's efforts to achieve visa liberalization, since this is an extremely important objective for the people of Kosovo. (www.vlada.si)

- December 22nd, Foreign Minister Karel Erjavec announced Slovenia will block neighboring Croatia from entering the passport-free Schengen Zone until it implements an international ruling on their border dispute. Erjavec said "'Slovenia will issue a negative opinion on (Croatia's accession to) Schengen. A country that does not know where its border is cannot be a part of the Schengen Zone.'" Slovenian Foreign Ministers also warned that Slovenia may even move to

block Croatia's accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (www.sta.si, www.europeonline-magazine.eu)

- December 23rd, President Borut Pahor formally started his second presidential term. He was sworn in at the National Assembly one day ago, taking over another 5-year term. Pahor said he would strive to be "the best President for all citizens." He also noted that it is our right and duty to create an inclusive society in which there is space for everyone, no matter how different he may be. (www.sta.si, www.delo.si)

TURKEY: December 17th, Turkey intends to open an embassy in East Jerusalem, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, days after leading calls at a summit of Muslim leaders for the world to recognize it as the capital of Palestine. The Muslim nation summit was a response to U.S. President Donald Trump's December 6th, 2017 decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Erdogan said in a speech to members of his Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi – AKP) in the southern province of Karaman that Turkey's consulate general in Jerusalem was already represented by an ambassador. *"God willing, the day is close when officially, with God's permission, we will open our embassy there"* Erdogan said. (www.reuters.com)

- December 18th, Turkey's first drillship, the DEEPSEA METRO 2, is expected to arrive to the country by the end of December 2017 with exploratory offshore drilling in the Mediterranean to begin in early 2018. The ship will be used by Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO). Turkey has already undertaken oil and gas exploration

using two seismic ships, but the DEEPSEA METRO 2 will be the country's first active drillship. The South Korean merchant vessel was produced in 2011, has a length of 229 meters and is capable of drilling to a maximum depth of 12 Km. Turkey's first seismic vessel BARBAROS HAYRETTIN PASA has been conducting operations in the Mediterranean since April 2017 while a second vessel, the MTA ORUC REIS is ready for exploration. Turkey's Energy and Natural Resources Minister Berat Albayrak announced in October that Turkey would make its first deep drilling in 2018. (www.dailysabah.com)

- December 23rd, main opposition Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP) leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu claimed that he will take back a total of 18 islands "occupied by Greece" in 2019. His statement came after the Greek Defense Minister Panos Kammenos has stated "Come and get it". Kilicdaroglu said "The Greek Defense Minister says come and get it. I will come and take all of those islands back. Why am I saying this? They said come and get it for Cyprus back in the day. What did Ecevit do? He went there and took it back." The debate over the Greek Aegean islands sparked when the CHP leader criticized President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on December 11th, 2017 over his failure to raise the issue of "18 occupied islands" during his visit to Greece. (www.hyrrietarynews.com)

www.hermesresearch.eu

email: info@hermesresearch.eu

Editor in Chief: Ioannis Karampelas